

KIRKMAN • OTTLEY • CRABTREE

INVINCIBLE™



VOLUME THREE

PERFECT STRANGERS

Introduction by Tom Brevoort

image COMICS PRESENTS

INVINCIBLE™

PERFECT STRANGERS



**CREATED BY
ROBERT KIRKMAN
& CORY WALKER**

image®

Writer, Letterer

**Robert
Kirkman**

Penciler, Inker

**Ryan
Ottley**

Colorist

**Bill
Crabtree**



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PRINTED IN USA.



INVINCIBLE INTRODUCTION

by Tom Brevoort

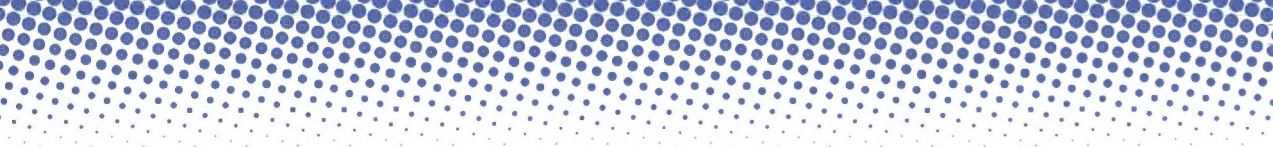
The first time I met Robert Kirkman in person, he insulted my shoes. He sat right there, in a guest chair in my office up at Marvel and just leaned over and insulted my shoes. Now, as a general rule, this isn't the best way to endear yourself to an editor to whom you intend to sell yourself as a prospective writer. I certainly don't endorse it as a game plan. And yet, Robert ended up working on CAPTAIN AMERICA for me, and MARVEL TEAM-UP, and MARVEL KNIGHTS 2099, and probably a couple more things by the time you read this introduction.

The reason for this shocking turn of events, as unbelievable as any twist ending he ever wrote into a comic book tale, can be found within the stories contained within this third volume of INVINCIBLE, the superhero strip Kirkman co-created with Cory Walker, who himself owes me some pages at the moment.

INVINCIBLE unabashedly showcases the author's love of the superhero genre—all of its color, its vibrancy, and even its silliness. It's a comic book that isn't ashamed of being a comic book—and that's what attracted me to it when one of the dozens of copies of the first INVINCIBLE trade paperback that Kirkman had been flooding the Marvel offices with fell into my hands.

INVINCIBLE is fun. Or, at least it was up till now.




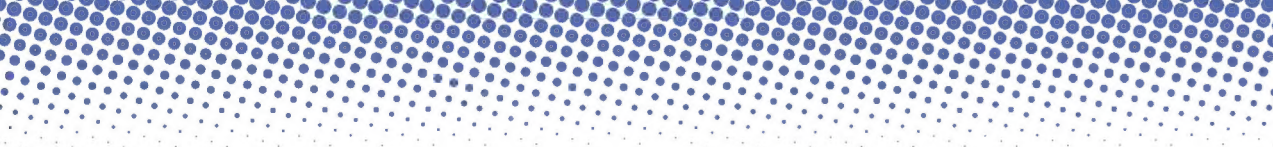


The stories in this volume of INVINCIBLE transition the title between the way-it-had-been into the series it was meant to become. Such “everything-you-know-is-wrong” tales have been a staple of the industry since Alan Moore pretty much popularized them in the early 1980s. The difference here is that it’s no Johnny-come-lately overturning the apple carts that make the series work, no latter-day genius stretching for the twist that’d reinvigorate interest in a long-running franchise. This turn of events was part of the original series conception right from the get-go—or at least that’s what Kirkman maintains, but with that guy, who can really tell.

In any case, the good news is that, even with the startling reversals that await you on the coming pages, INVINCIBLE has lost none of its sparkle, none of its wit and none of its charm. If anything, these stories turned the dial up to eleven, increasing the drama and the tension in the tradition of the best superhero soap operas that preceded it.

Robert himself wears slip-on sneakers, which contain an elastic fastener that expands to allow one’s foot to be inserted. This in marked contrast to my own Velcro-fastened sneakers. So far as I know, he never commented on the footwear of either Brian Michael Bendis or Kurt Busiek, which might explain the good words they had for his work when the subject came up. Or maybe they were just trying to disguise their own tardiness with deadlines by distracting a frazzled editor. Whatever the reason, it worked.





As it seems to have worked on the industry in general. And so, we've watched this boy wonder conquer the world of comicdom, one series at a time, one reader at a time. I swear, he's writing something like a third of the items listed in the monthly Diamond Previews catalogue at this point. And he's been nominated for an Eisner award, which he deserves at the very least for his productivity. But the best, I think, is yet to come, as the added exposure of his upcoming gigs is sure to make Kirkman's name a household word in comic book buying households coast to coast.

And along the way Robert invited me to write the introduction to the next INVINCIBLE trade paperback. Which was probably meant to seem like sucking up to the boss. But I've been around the business long enough to realize that what Kirkman was really after was somebody he could sucker into pounding out a few hundred words extolling his virtues for free, on their own time—thinking it a compliment. But I did it nonetheless, which casts some questions upon my judgment. Which just goes to show, if you have enough talent, you can get away with anything.

I still maintain they were very nice shoes.

Tom Brevoort



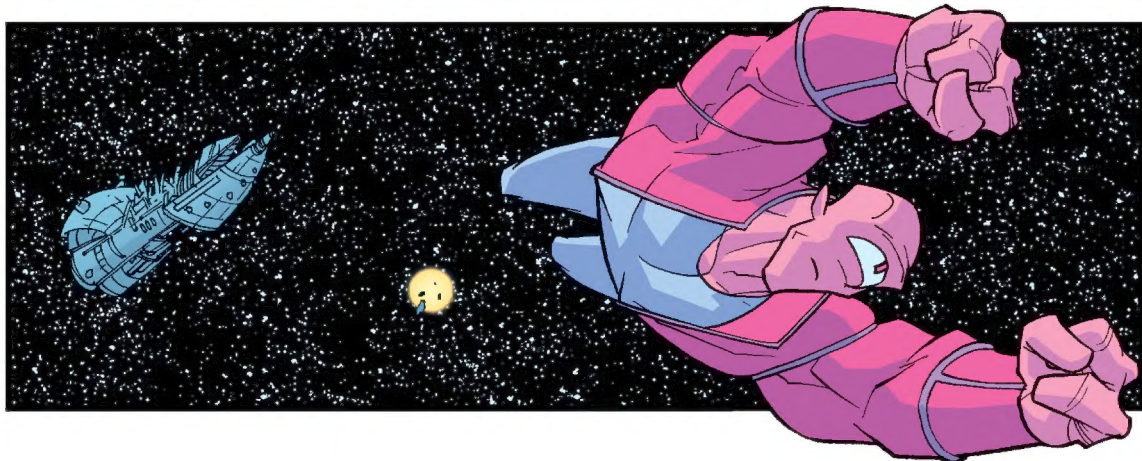
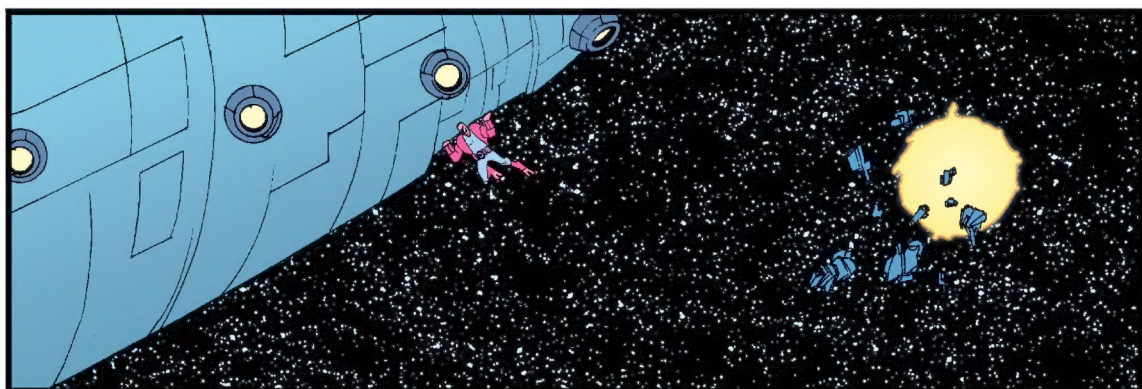
CHAPTER ONE

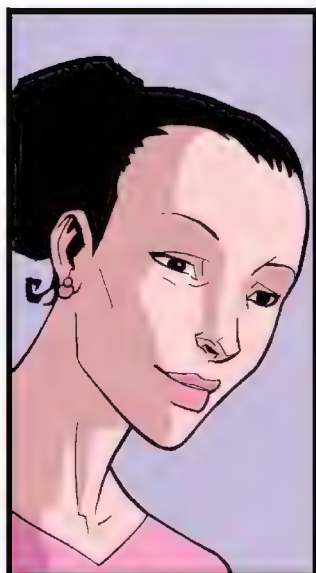
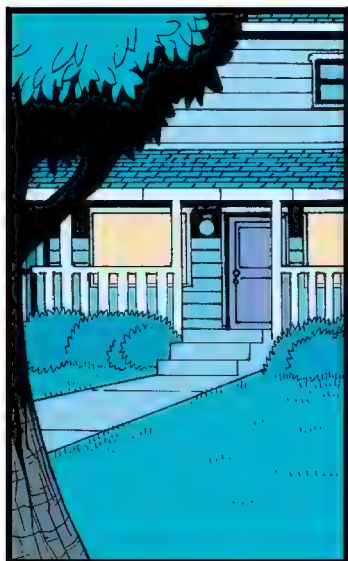


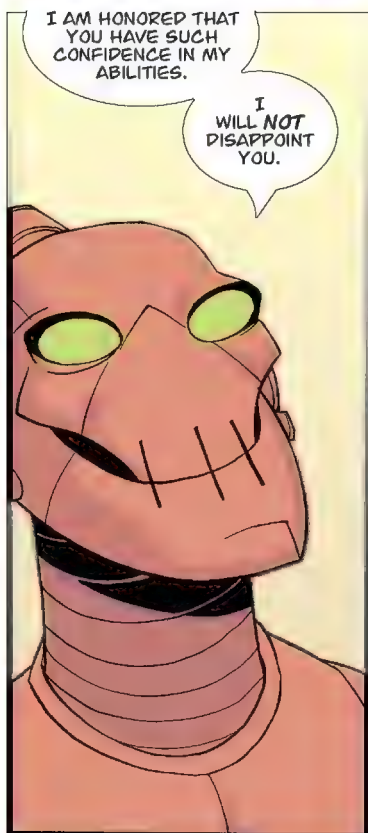
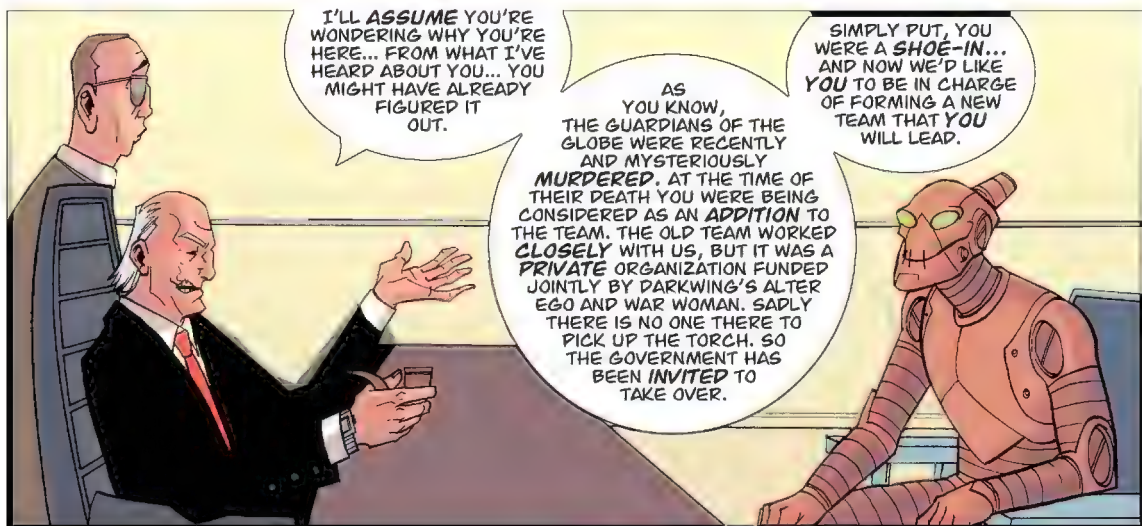
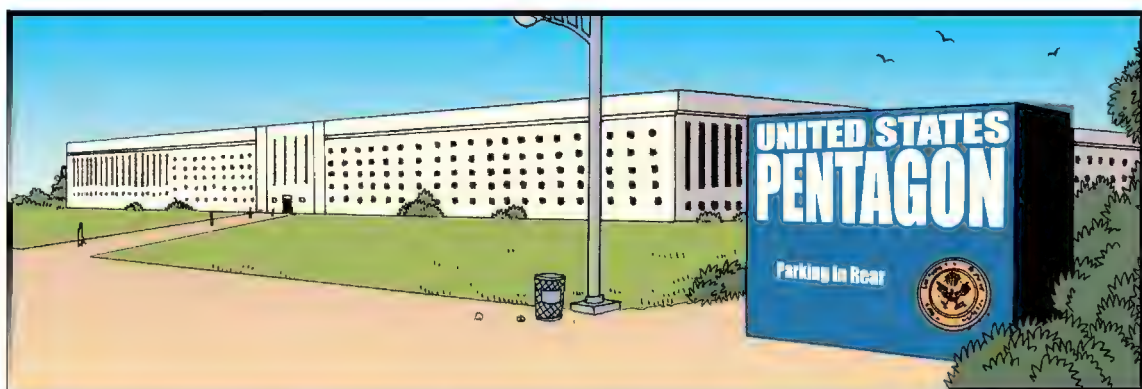


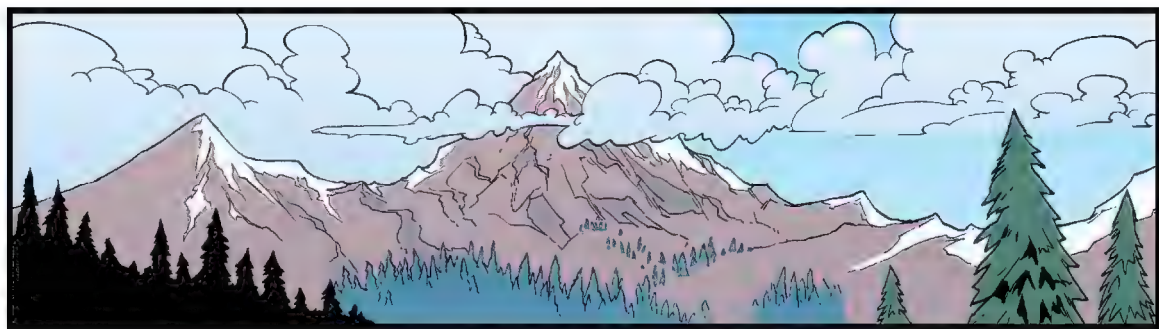
AMATEURS.

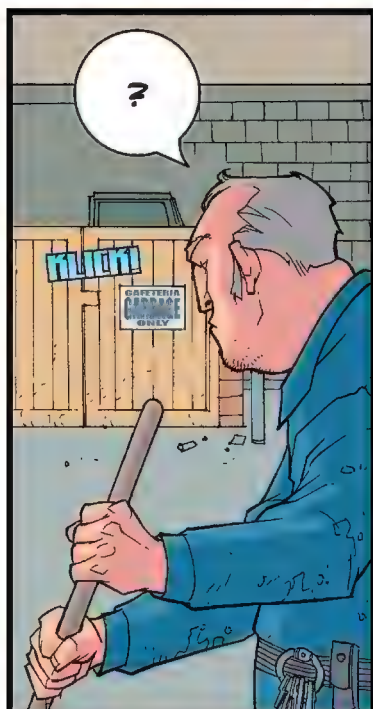
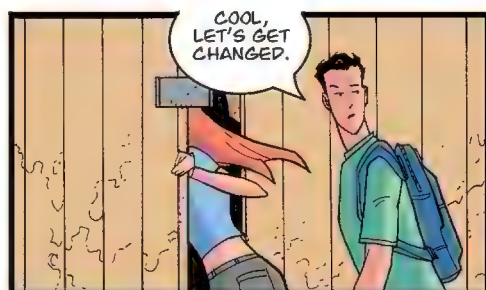
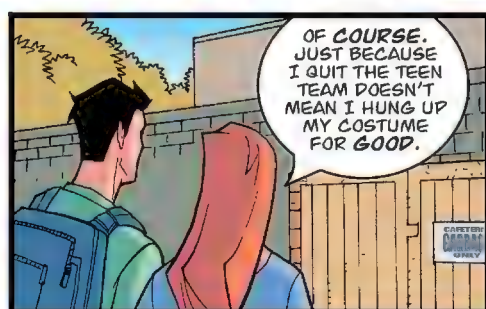
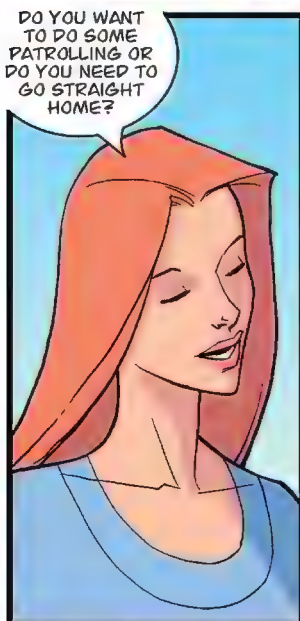


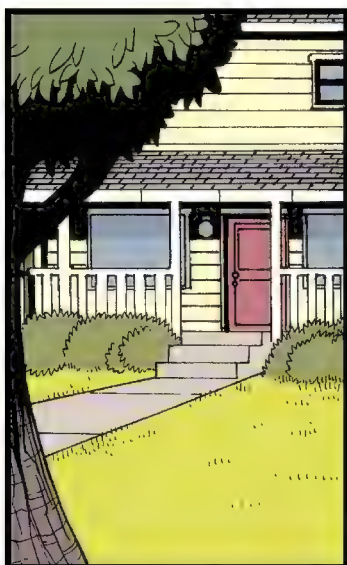












JEEZ.

YEAH, ARE WE ON A SECURE LINE? SORRY TO BOTHER YOU IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY BUT MARK **FINALLY** PUT ANOTHER ONE OF HIS COSTUMES IN THE WASH AND I CAN'T REMEMBER IF IT'S COLD THEN **WARM** OR **WARM** THEN **COLD**. YOU'D THINK I WOULD **KNOW** THIS BUT NOLAN HAS BEEN CLEANING HIS UNIFORMS WITH SOLAR RADIATION SINCE I SHRANK HIS **FIRST** ONE ON ACCIDENT.

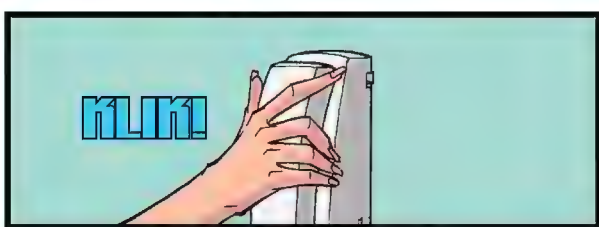


IT'S ACTUALLY **COLD** THEN **COLD**, LIKE A COLORFUL SWEATER, BUT YOU SHOULD **REALLY** TALK NOLAN INTO GETTING ONE OF MY IONIC CLEANSING MACHINES. IT'D **SURE** SAVE YOU A LOT OF WORK.

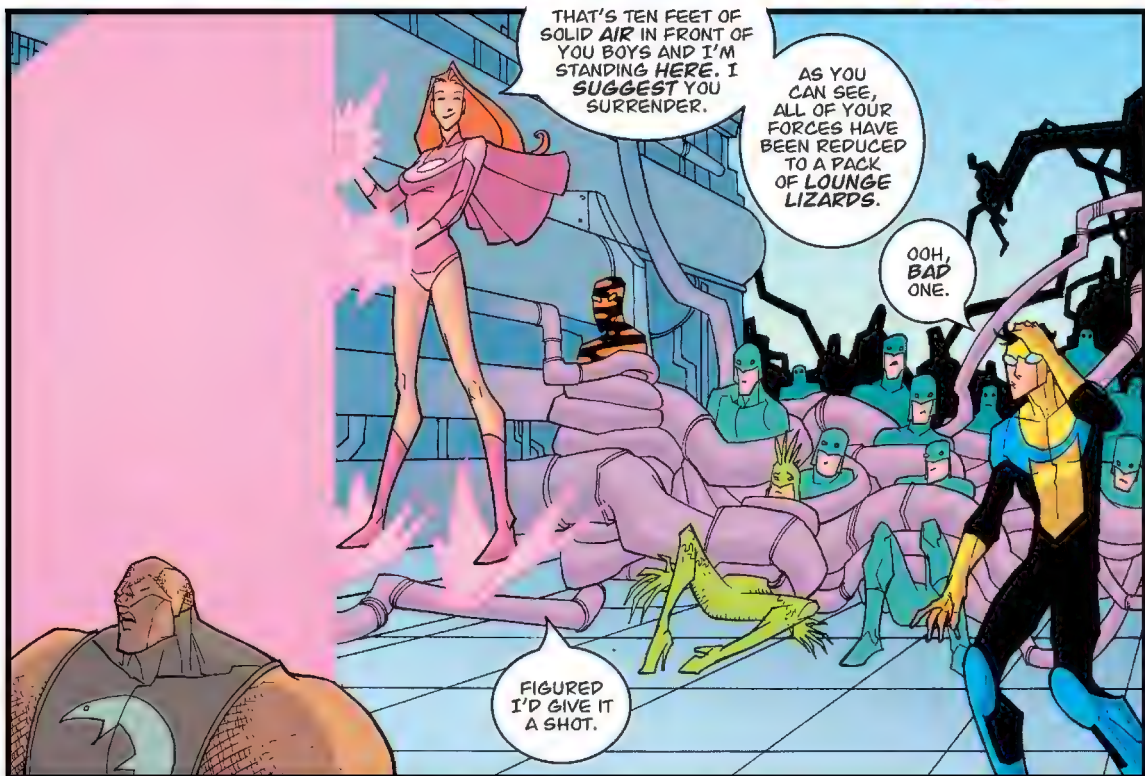
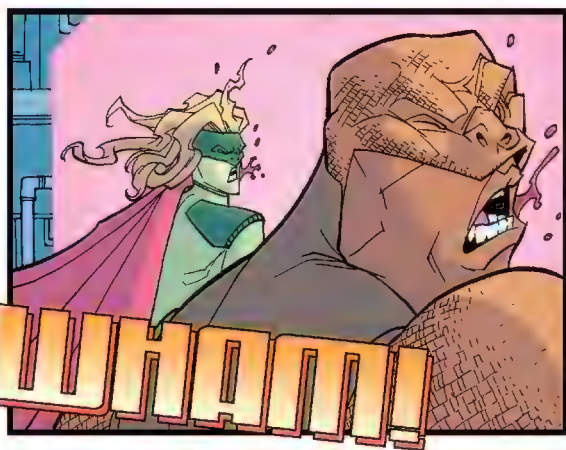
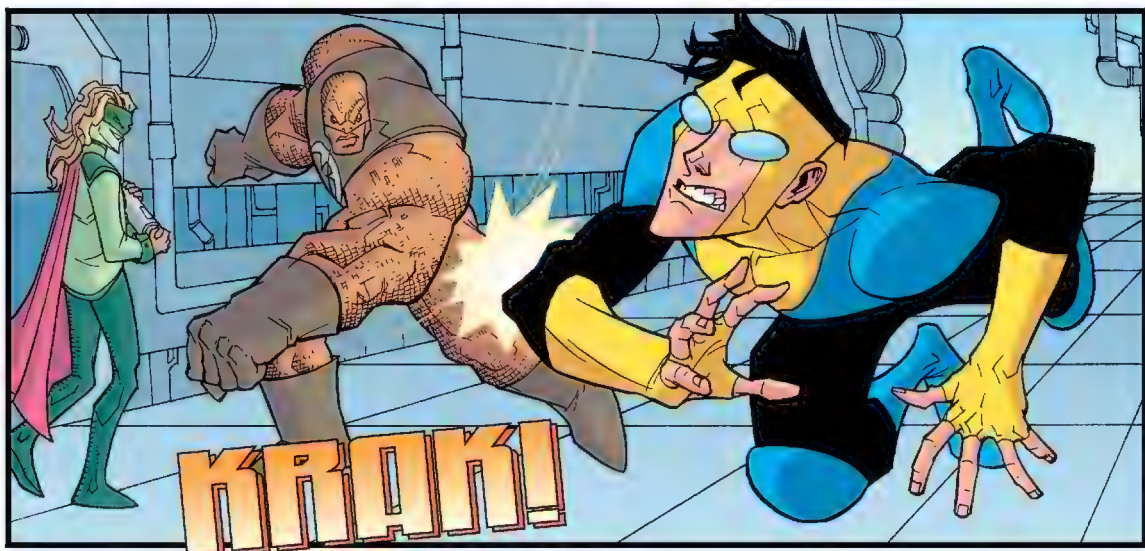
OH, SILLY ME... I REMEMBER THAT, NOW! AND I'VE **GIVEN** UP ON THE ION THING. NOLAN DOESN'T SEEM TO **WORRY** ABOUT GIVING ME MORE READING TIME... AND WE'RE TRYING TO **SAVE** FOR MARK'S COLLEGE.

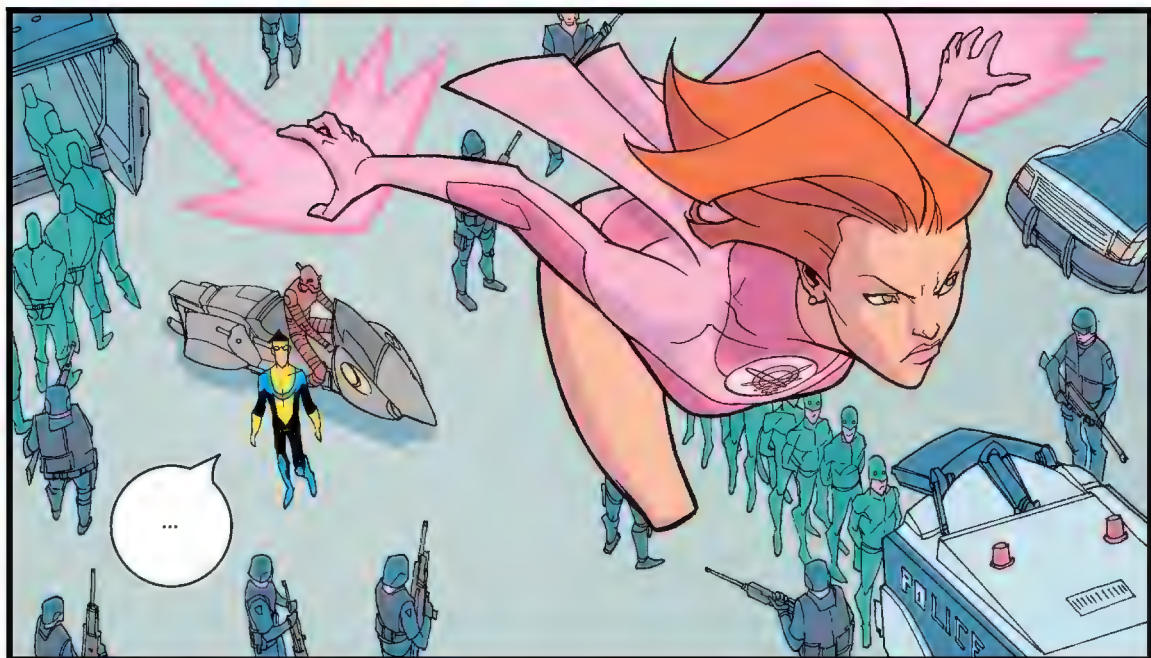
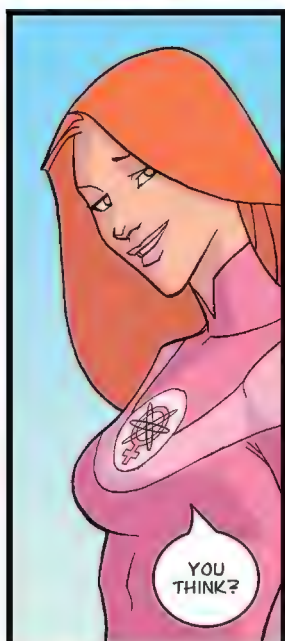


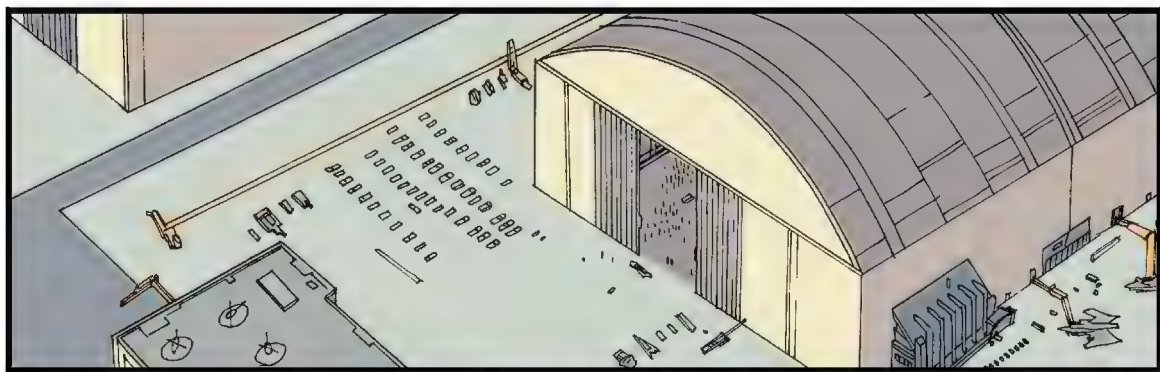
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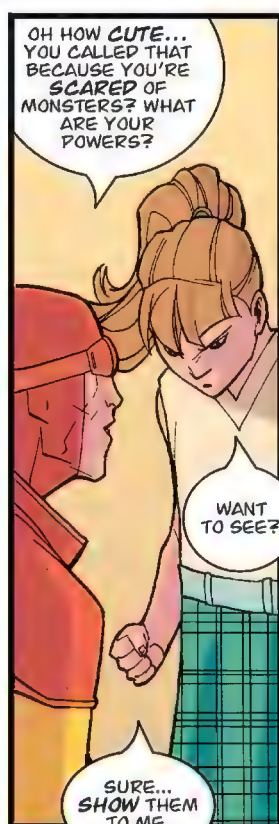
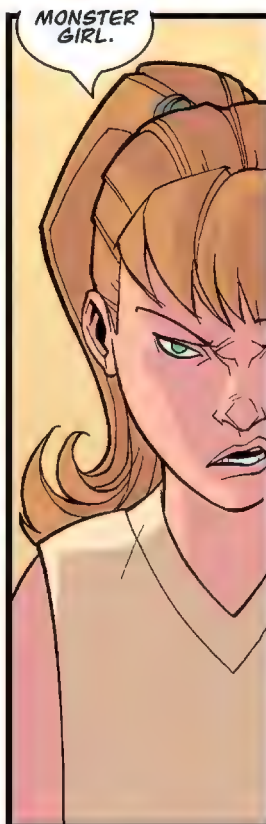
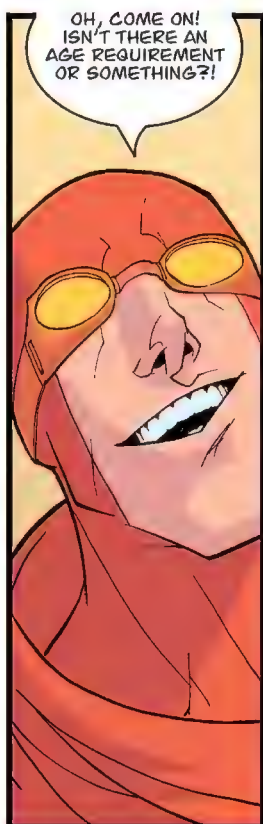
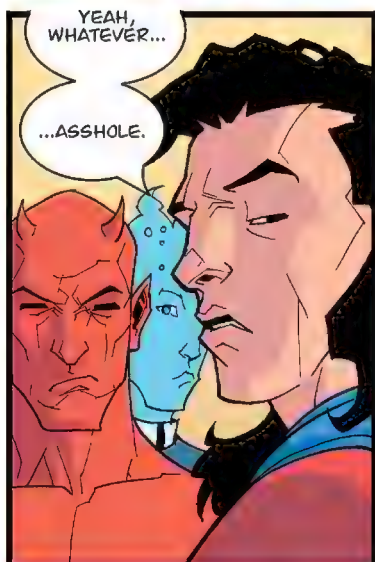




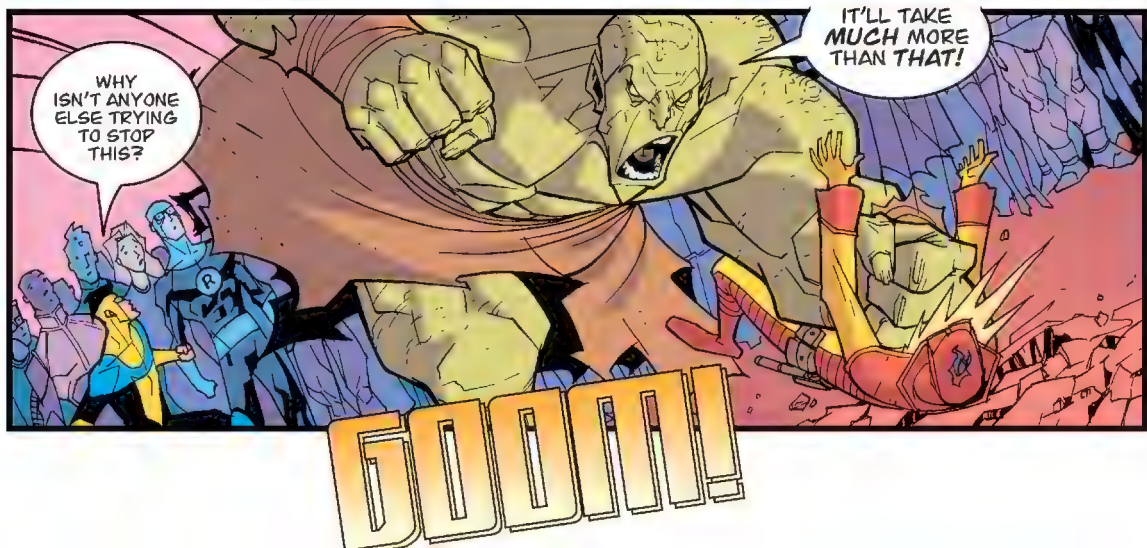
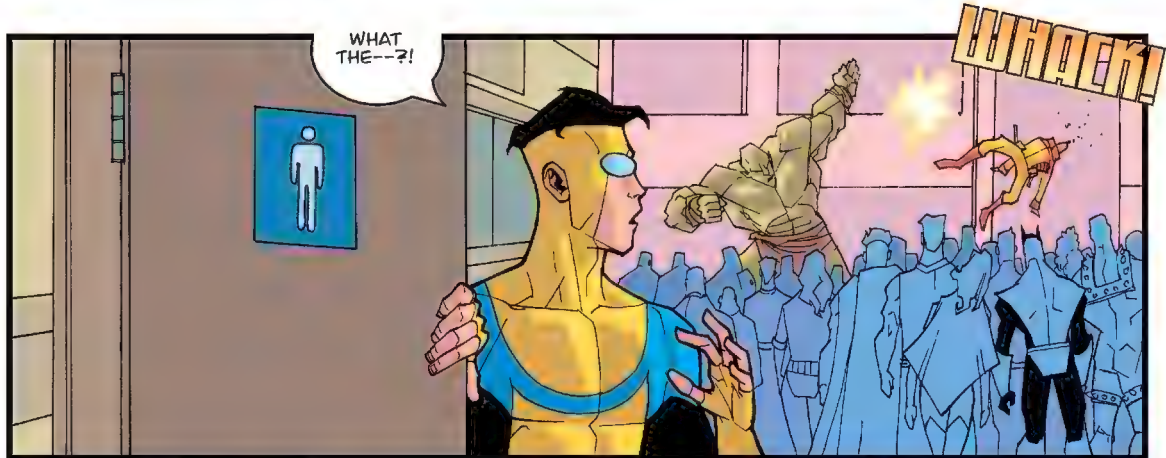


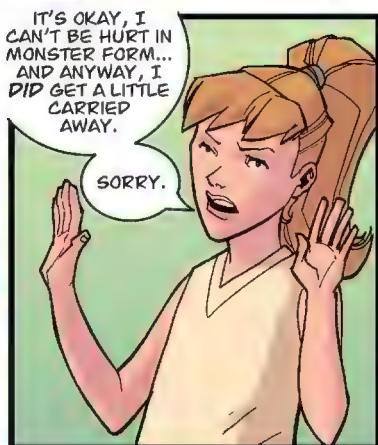


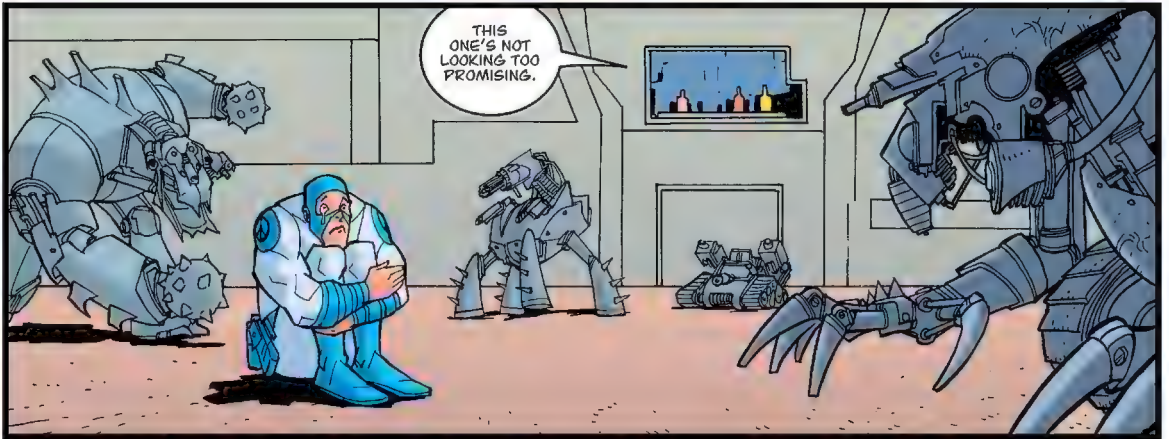










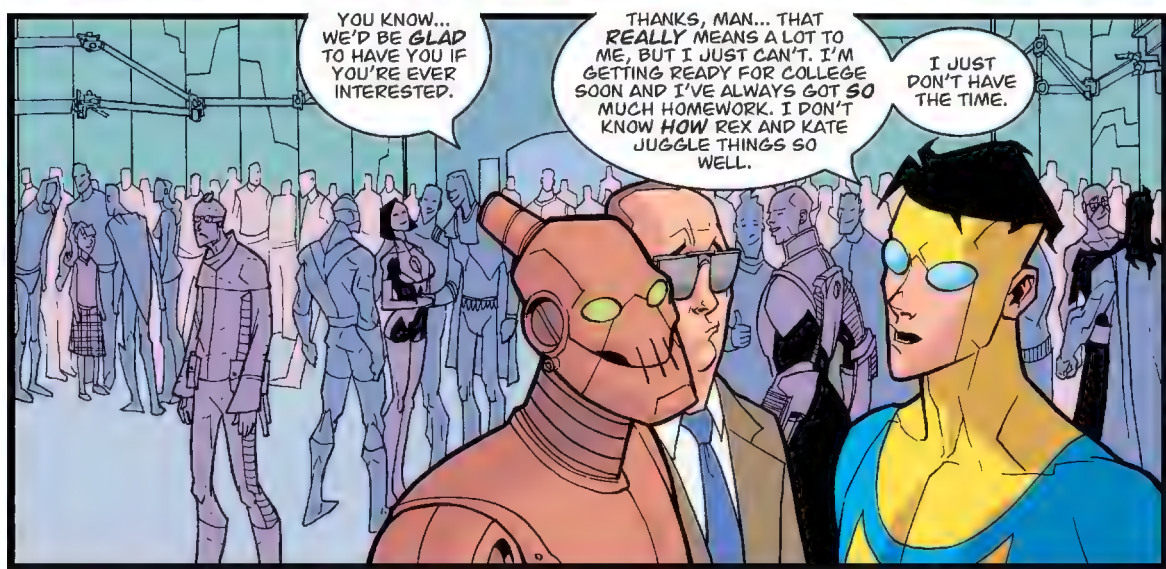
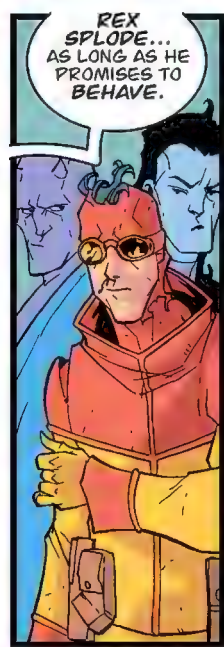
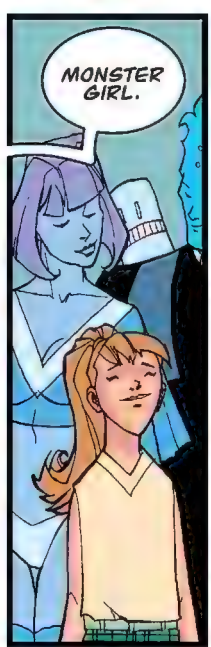
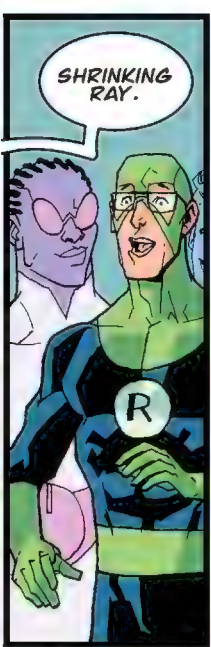
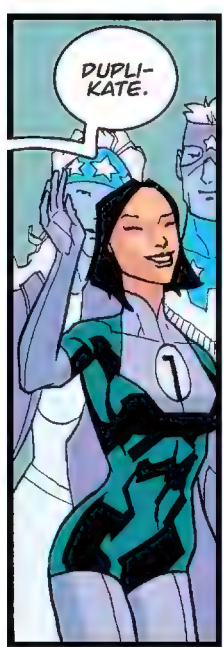
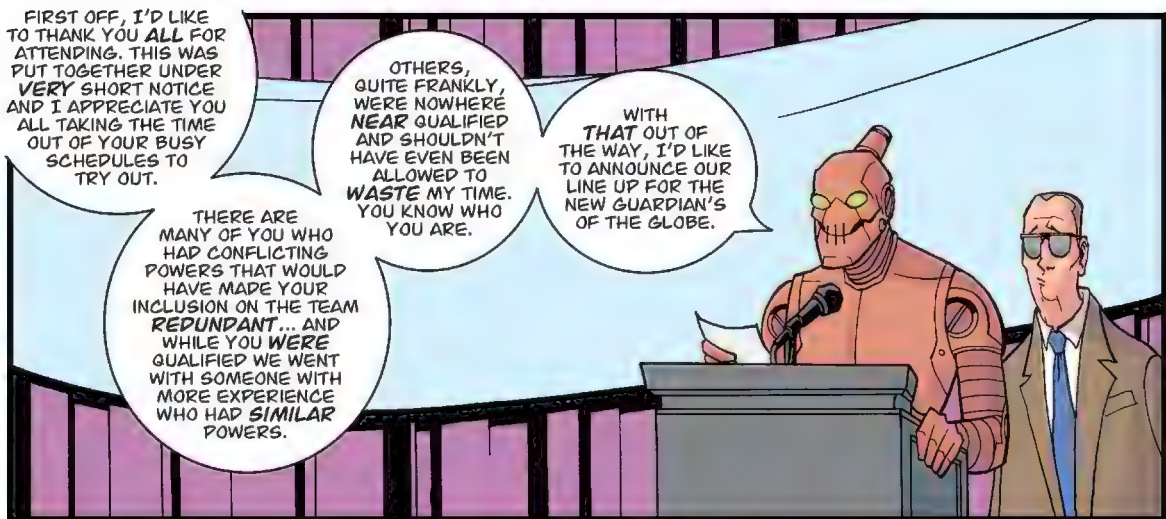


FIRST OFF, I'D LIKE TO THANK YOU **ALL** FOR ATTENDING. THIS WAS PUT TOGETHER UNDER **VERY SHORT NOTICE** AND I APPRECIATE YOU ALL TAKING THE TIME OUT OF YOUR BUSY SCHEDULES TO TRY OUT.

THERE ARE MANY OF YOU WHO HAD CONFLICTING POWERS THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOUR INCLUSION ON THE TEAM **REDUNDANT...** AND WHILE YOU **WERE** QUALIFIED WE WENT WITH SOMEONE WITH MORE EXPERIENCE WHO HAD **SIMILAR** POWERS.

OTHERS, QUITE FRANKLY, WERE NOWHERE **NEAR** QUALIFIED AND SHOULDN'T HAVE EVEN BEEN ALLOWED TO **WASTE** MY TIME. YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE.

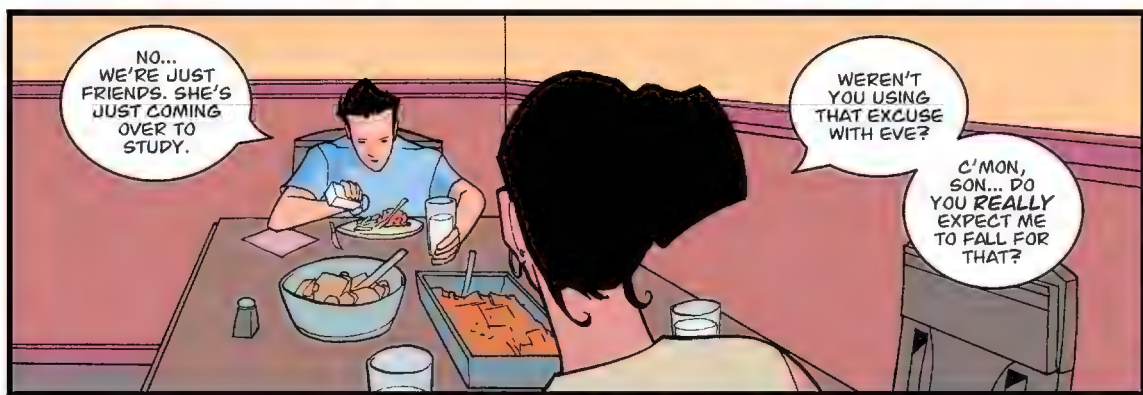
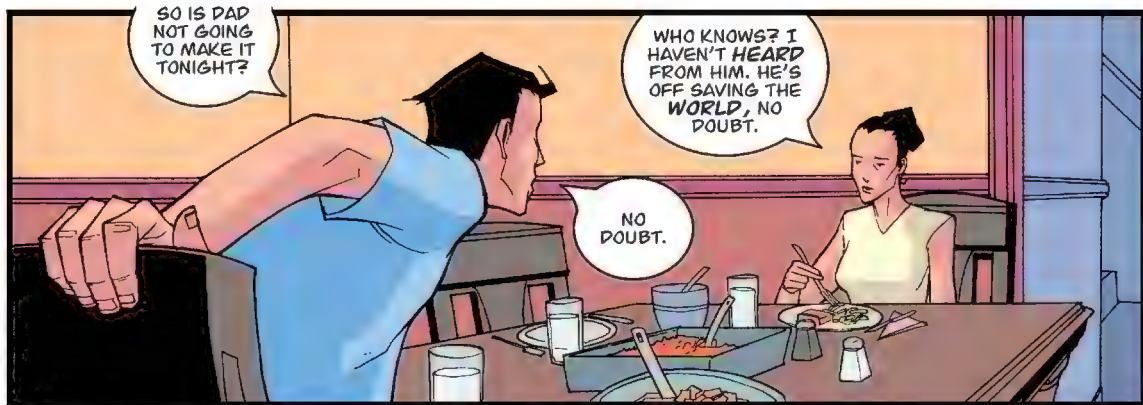
WITH **THAT** OUT OF THE WAY, I'D LIKE TO ANNOUNCE OUR LINE UP FOR THE NEW **GUARDIAN'S** OF THE GLOBE.

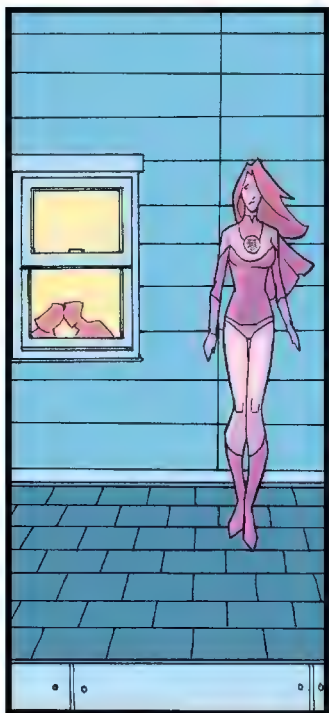
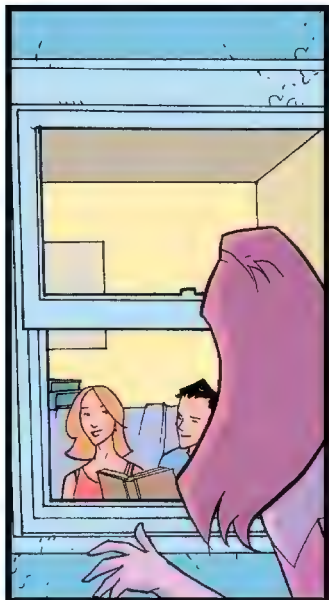
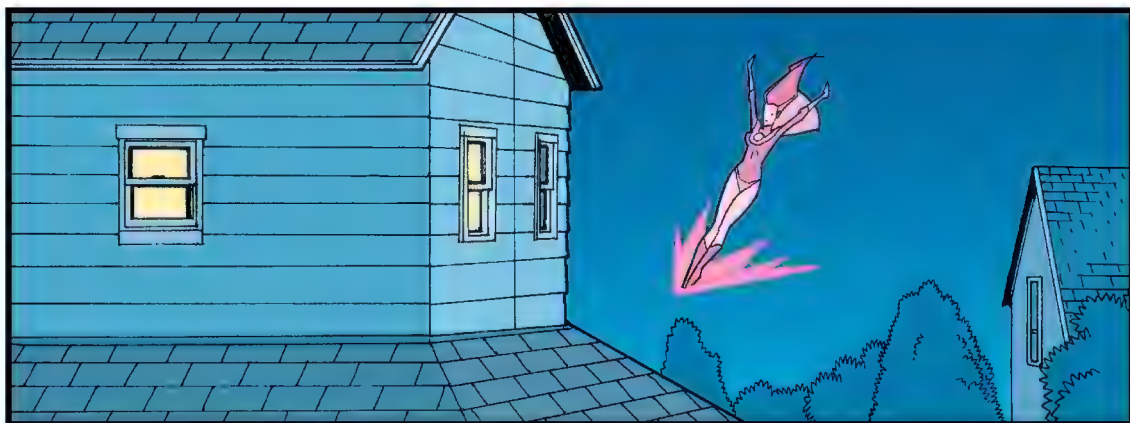


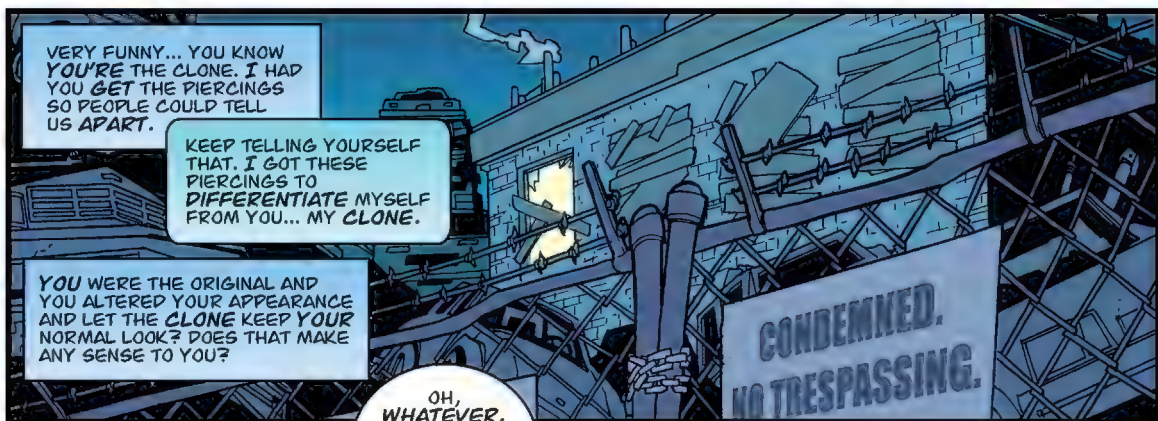
YOU KNOW... WE'D BE **GLAD** TO HAVE YOU IF YOU'RE EVER INTERESTED.

THANKS, MAN... THAT **REALLY** MEANS A LOT TO ME, BUT I JUST CAN'T. I'M GETTING READY FOR COLLEGE SOON AND I'VE ALWAYS GOT **SO** MUCH HOMEWORK. I DON'T KNOW **HOW** REX AND KATE JUGGLE THINGS SO WELL.

I JUST DON'T HAVE THE TIME.







VERY FUNNY... YOU KNOW YOU'RE THE CLONE. I HAD YOU GET THE PIERCINGS SO PEOPLE COULD TELL US APART.

KEEP TELLING YOURSELF THAT. I GOT THESE PIERCINGS TO DIFFERENTIATE MYSELF FROM YOU... MY CLONE.

YOU WERE THE ORIGINAL AND YOU ALTERED YOUR APPEARANCE AND LET THE CLONE KEEP YOUR NORMAL LOOK? DOES THAT MAKE ANY SENSE TO YOU?

OH, WHATEVER. BELIEVE WHAT YOU WANT... I TIRE OF THIS SUBJECT.

HOW MUCH MORE TINKERING MUST YOU DO? I'M TIRED OF ALL THIS WAITING.

YOU WANT HIM TO WAKE UP AND KILL US? I HAVE TO MAKE SURE THE CONTROL BEACONS ARE OPERATIONAL BEFORE I LOCK DOWN THE SEALS ON THE COLLAR.

IF HE WAKES UP AND HE'S NOT UNDER OUR CONTROL WE WILL HAVE SUCCEEDED ONLY IN RESURRECTING ONE OF OUR WORST ENEMIES. I TRUST YOU DON'T WANT THAT.

JUST HURRY.



THERE... STAND BACK I'M GOING TO SEAL IT. ONCE THE CONNECTION IS MADE, HE SHOULD REVIVE INSTANTLY.



?





CHAPTER TWO

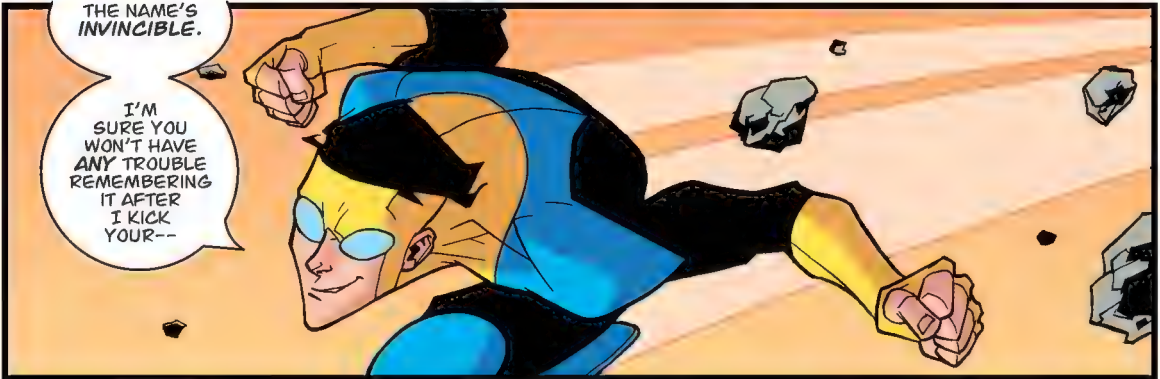






YOU THOUGHT YOU
COULD STOP ME?
YOU'RE UP AGAINST
DOC SEISMIC,
KID!

I
HAVEN'T
EVEN
HEARD OF
YOU!

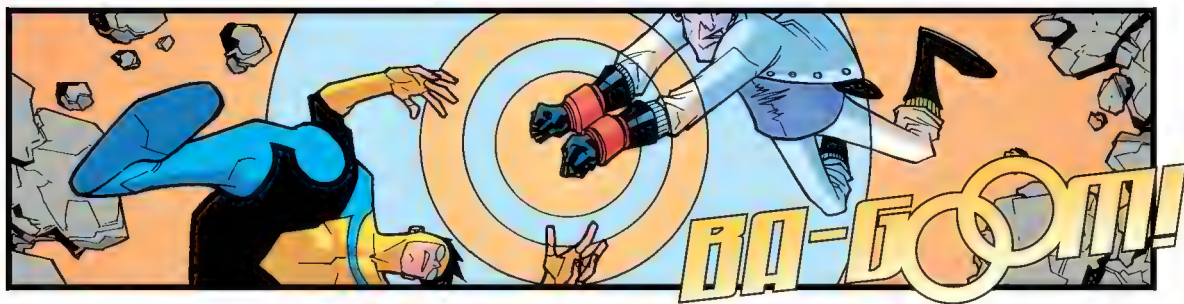


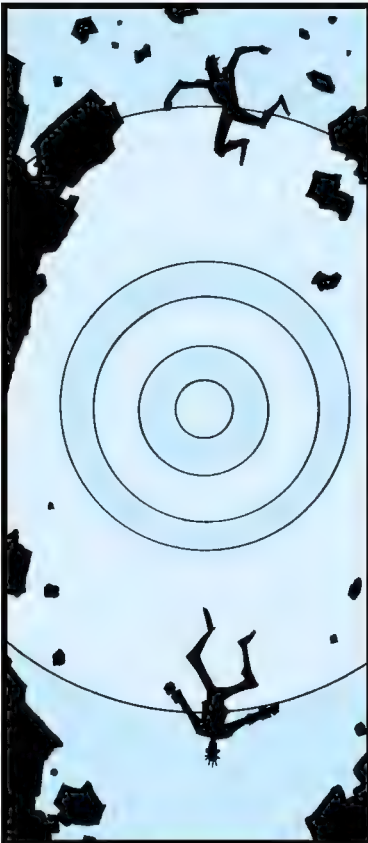
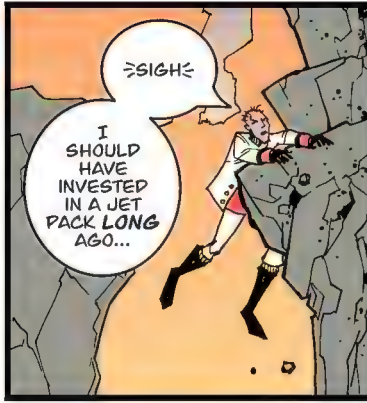
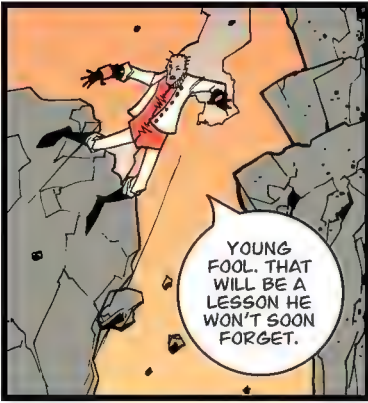
THE NAME'S
INVINCIBLE.

I'M
SURE YOU
WON'T HAVE
ANY TROUBLE
REMEMBERING
IT AFTER
I KICK
YOUR--

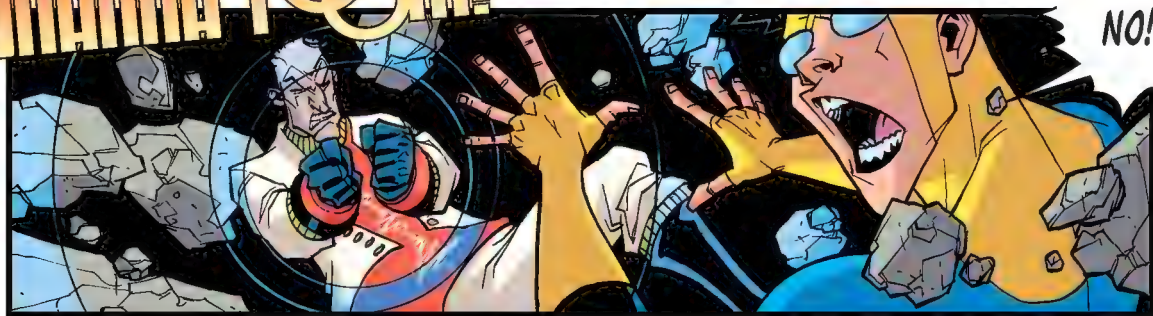


SHO-
DOM!





BRANKA-FOOM!



NO!



YOU SAVED OUR LIVES, INVINCIBLE. IF IT WEREN'T FOR YOU, HE'D HAVE DESTROYED MOUNT RUSHMORE AND US ALONG WITH IT.

THANKS.



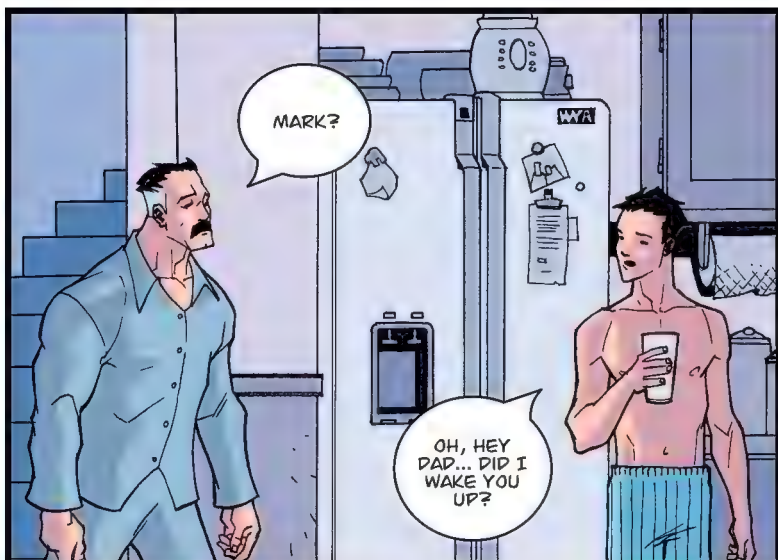
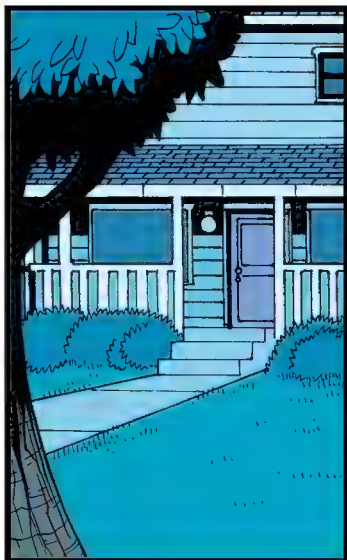
UM... DON'T MENTION IT.

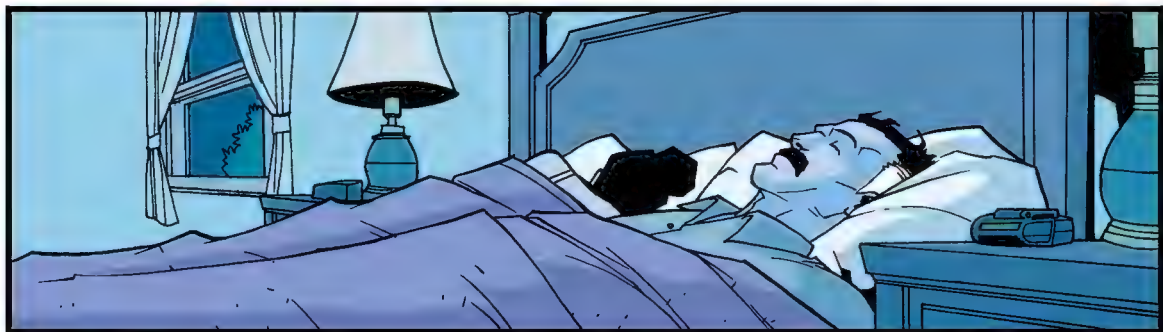
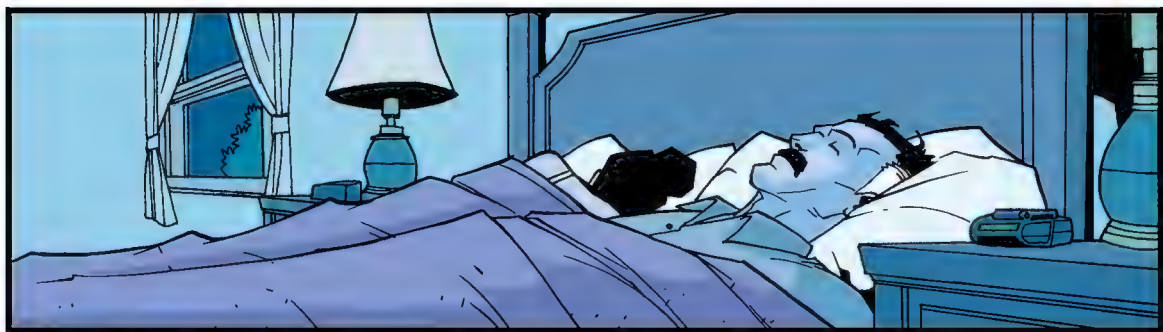
JUST DOING MY JOB.

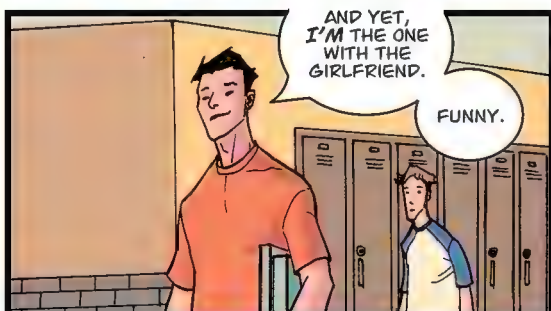
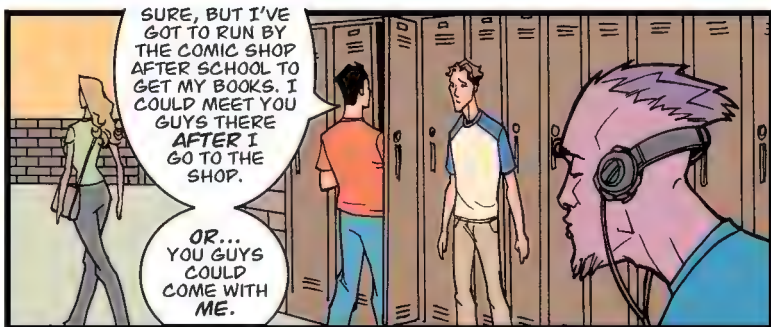
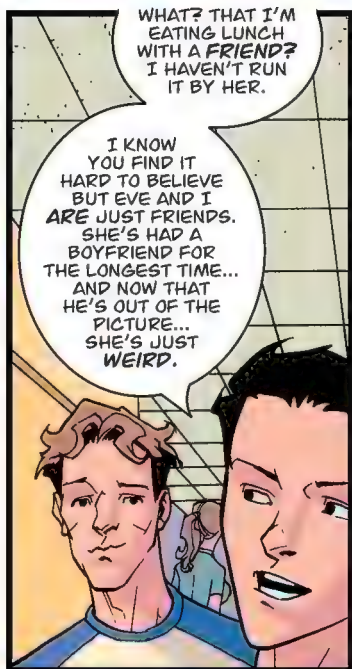
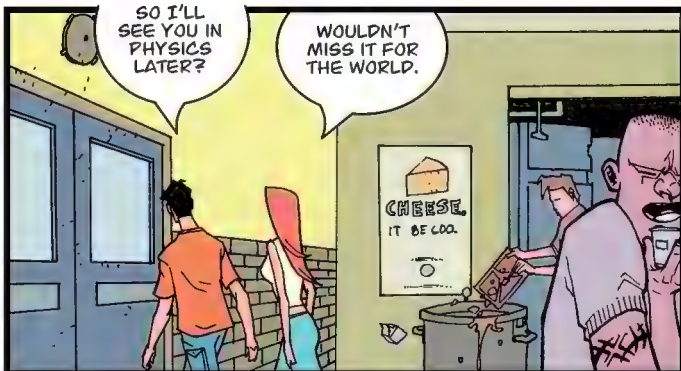


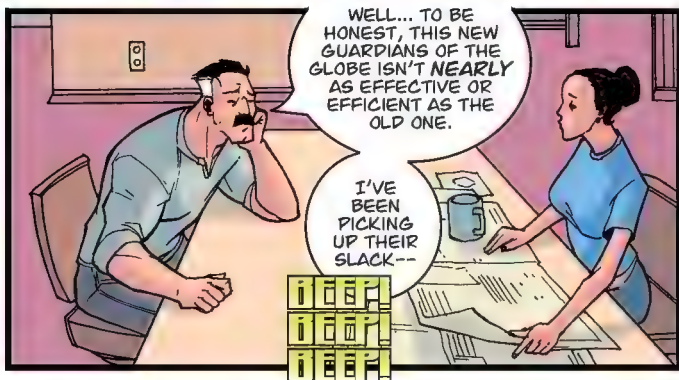
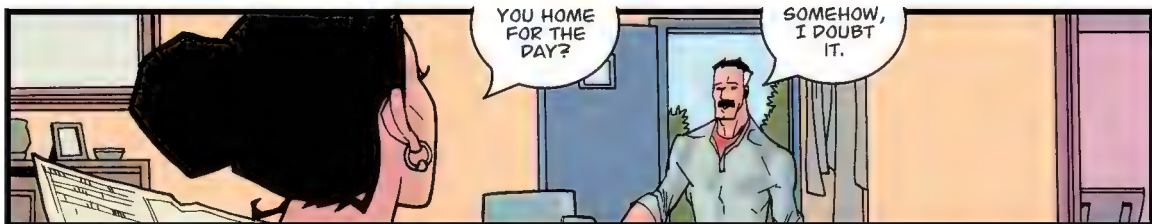
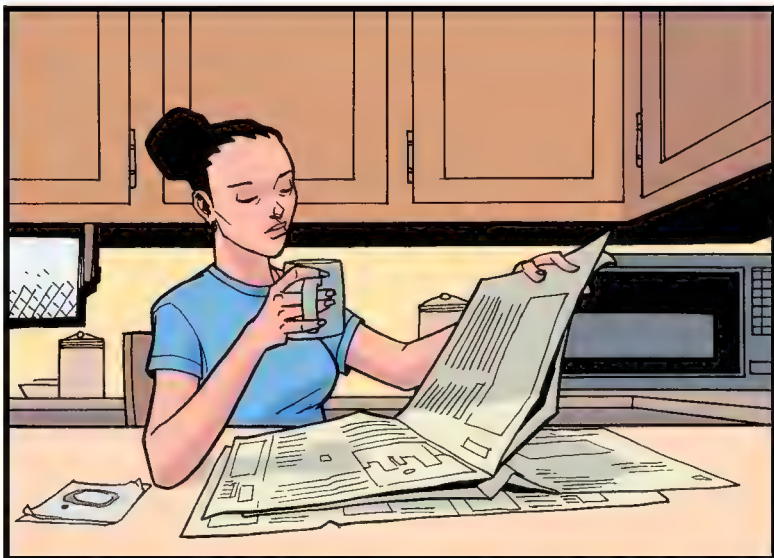
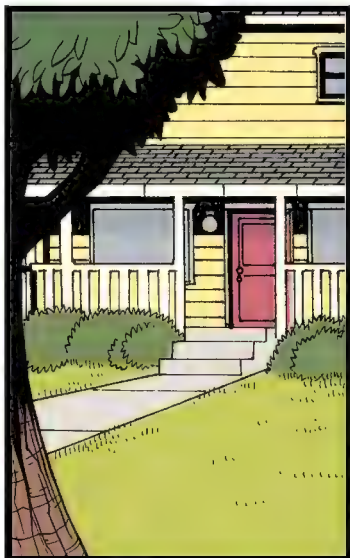
I COULD GET USED TO THIS.

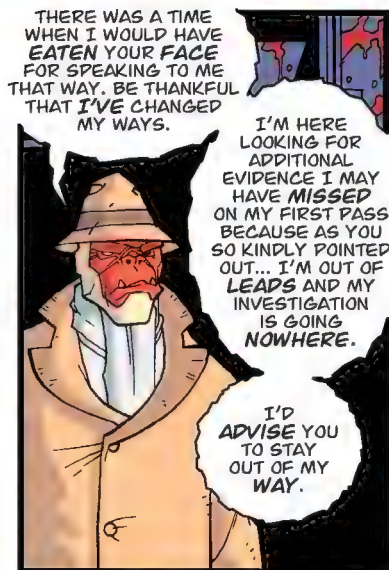


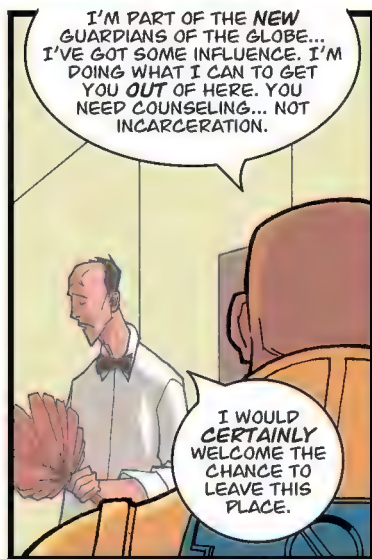
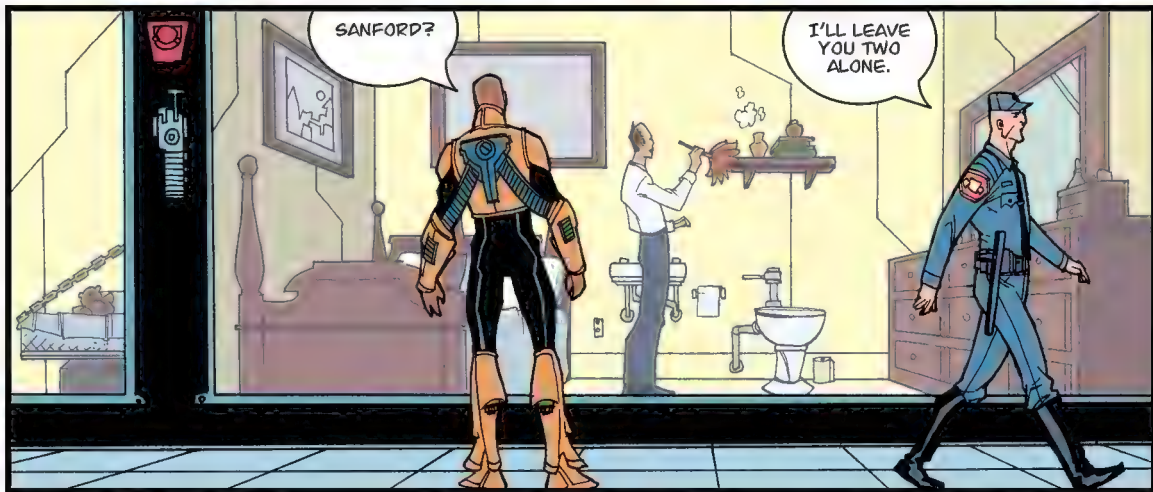


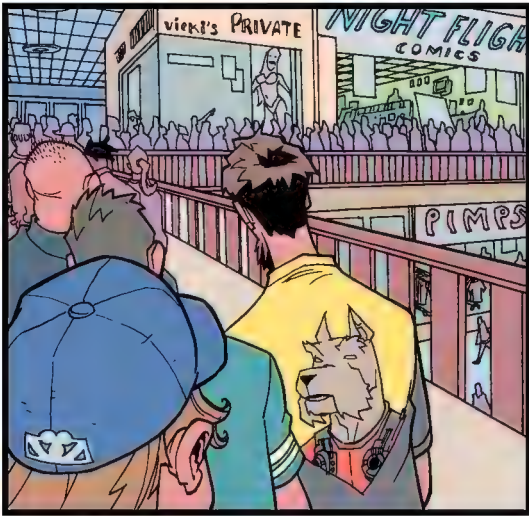


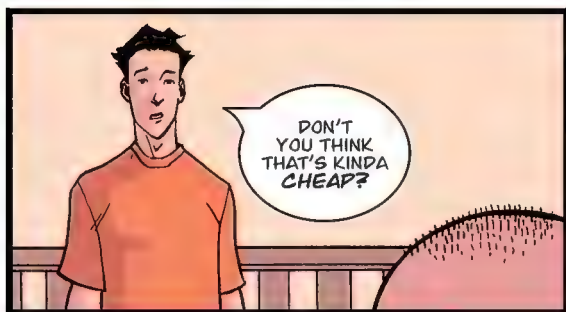
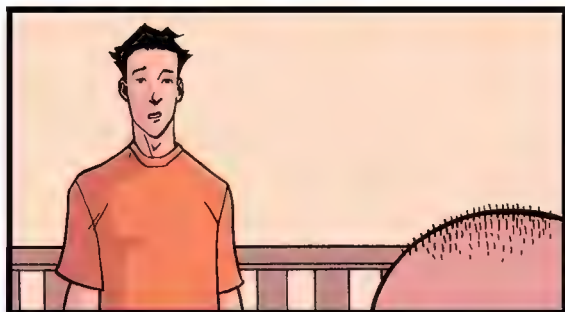
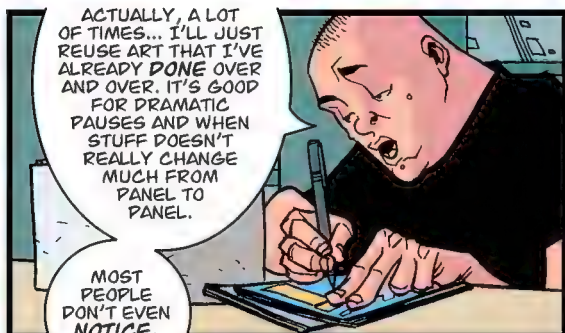








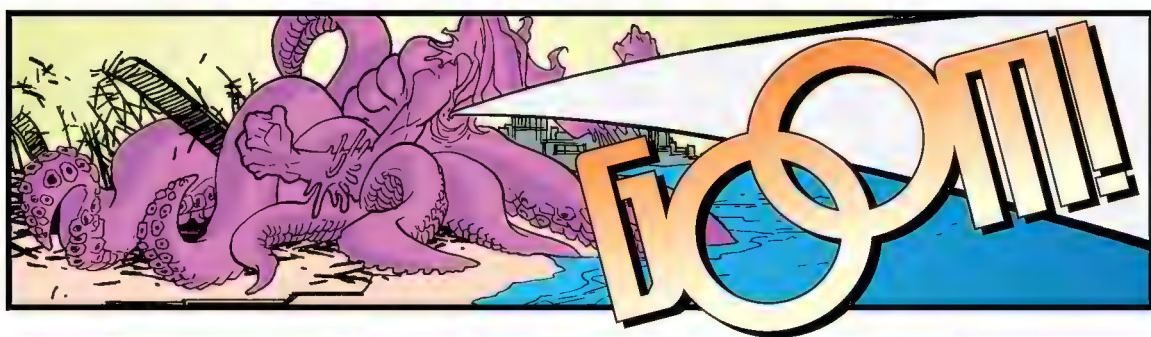




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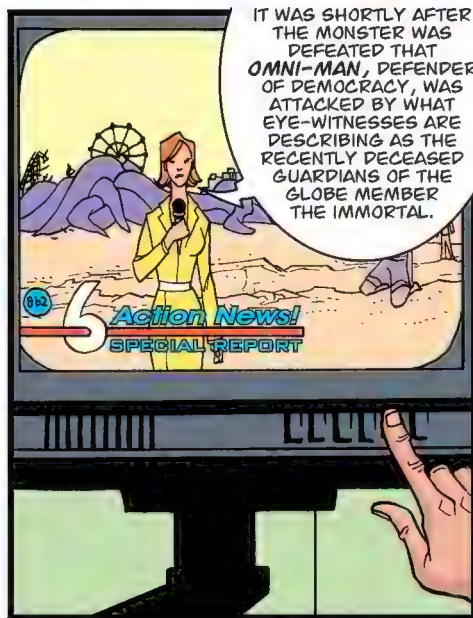


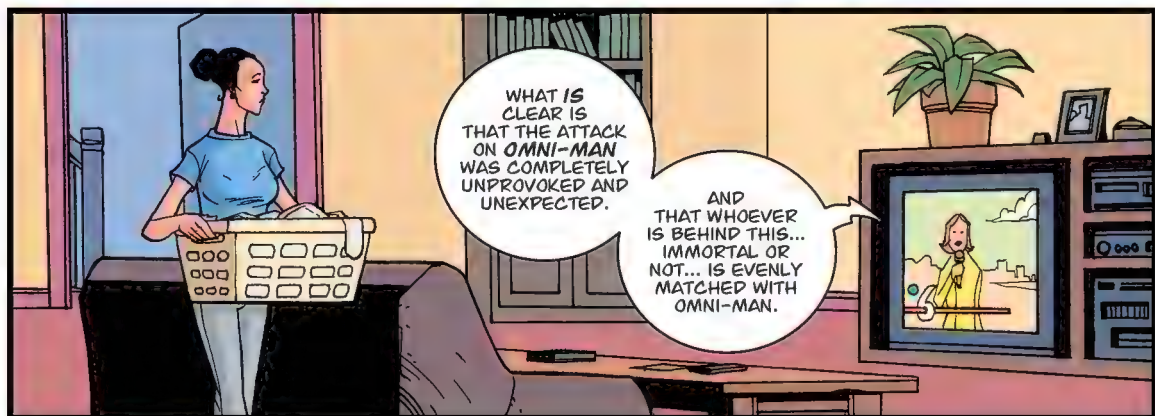
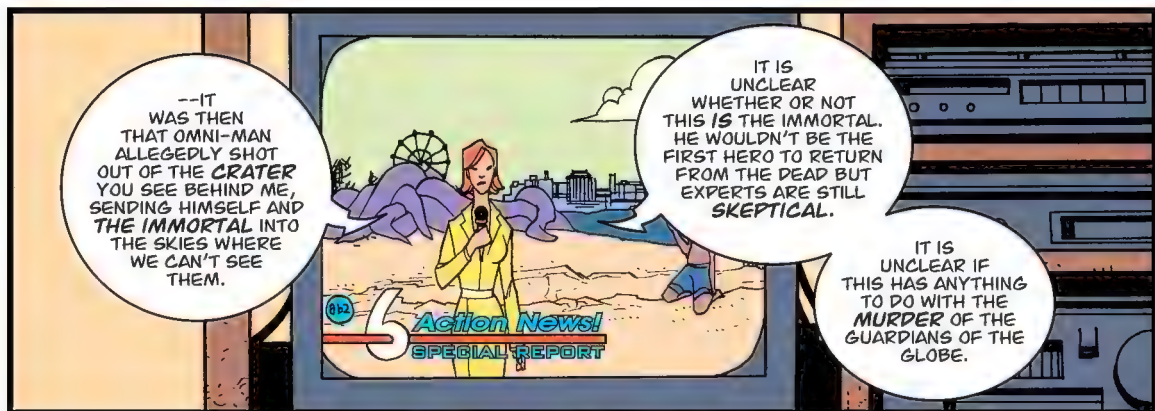
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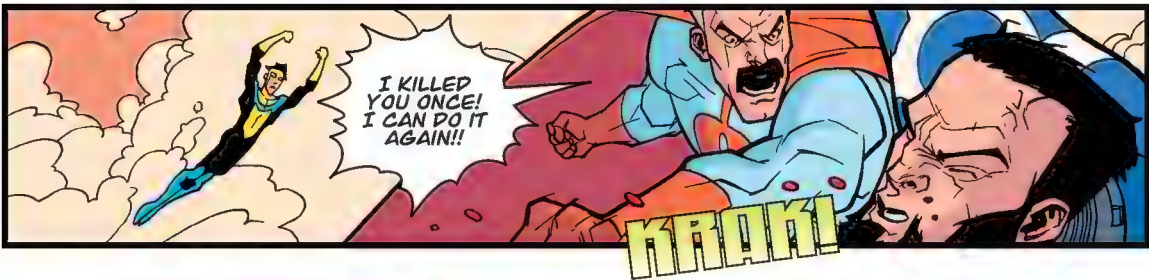
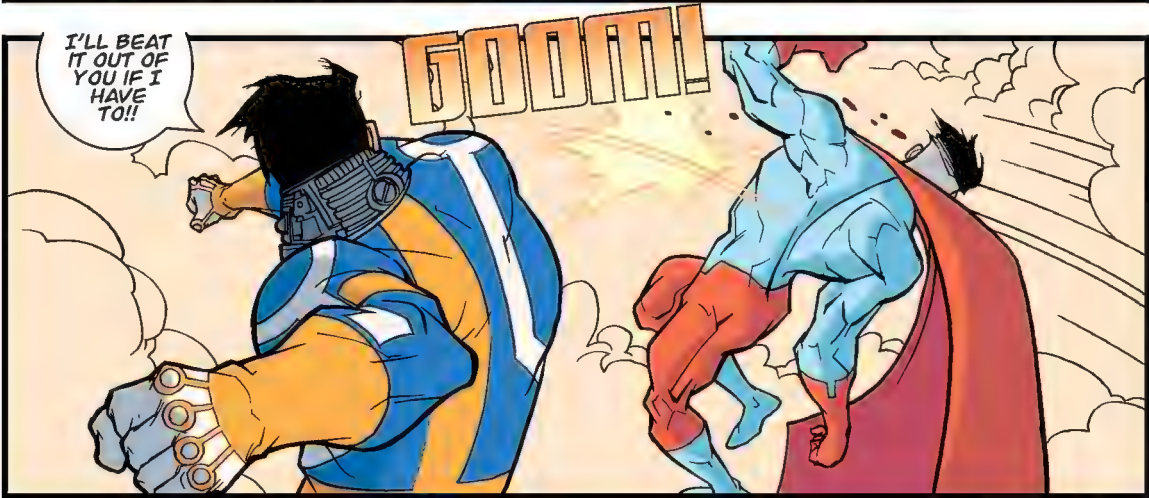
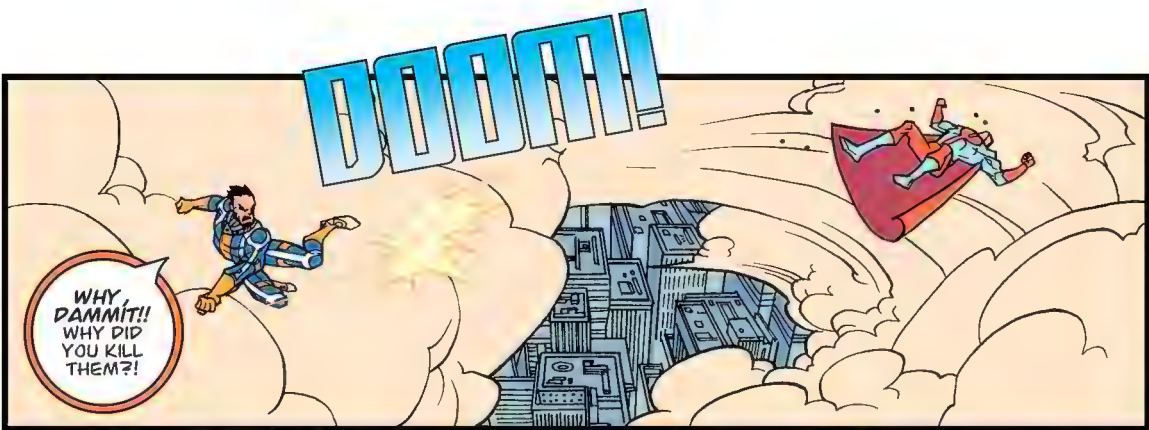










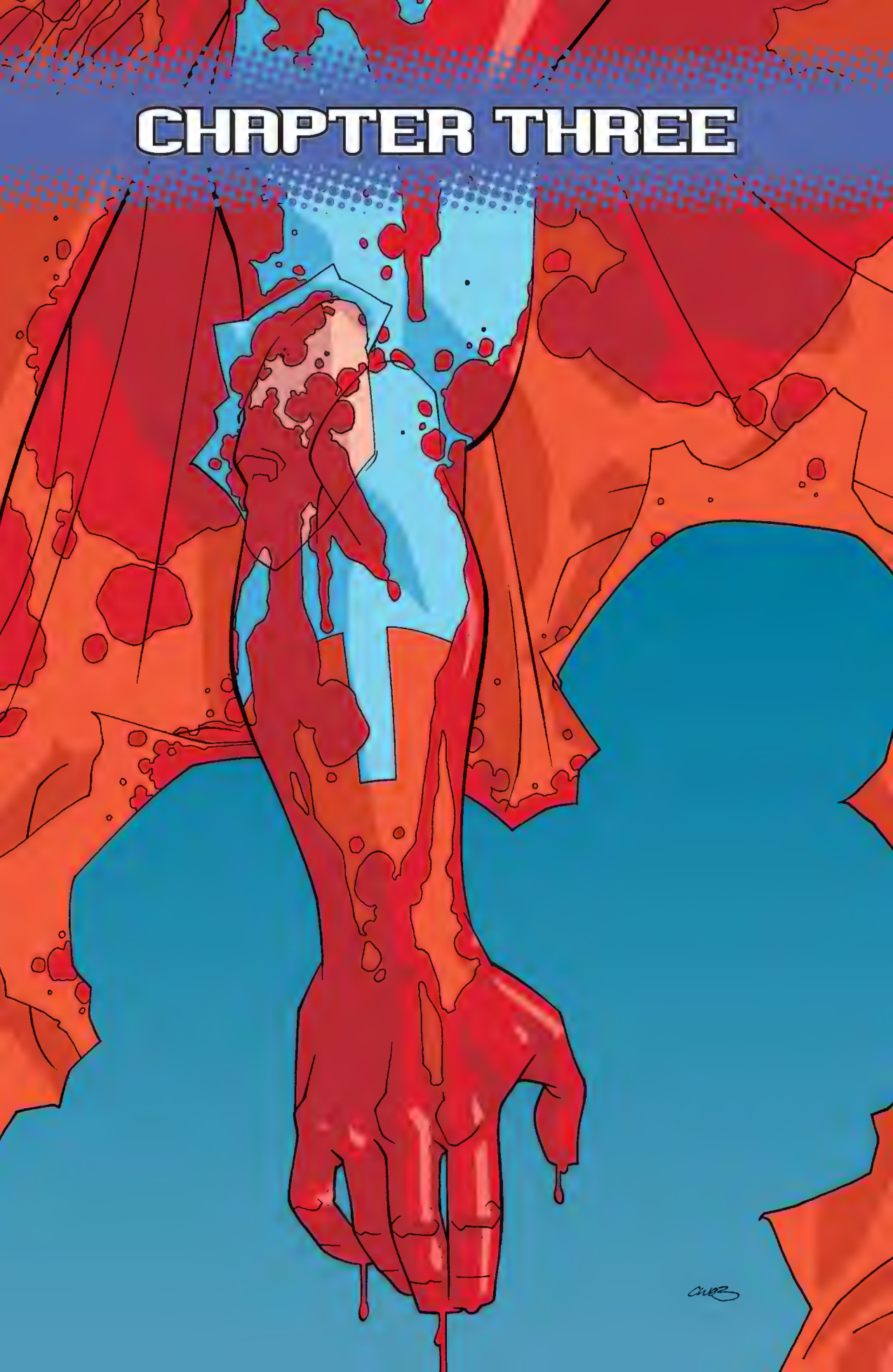








CHAPTER THREE

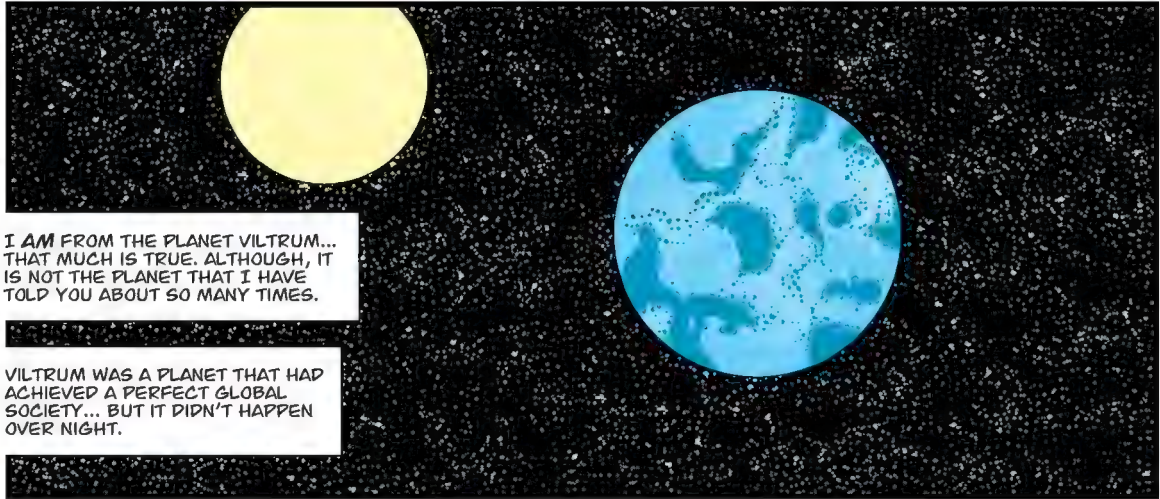


CURZ



OKAY,
SON... I'VE
DECIDED TO
TELL YOU THE
TRUTH.

I
THINK YOU'RE
OLD ENOUGH TO
KNOW WHERE I
REALLY COME
FROM.



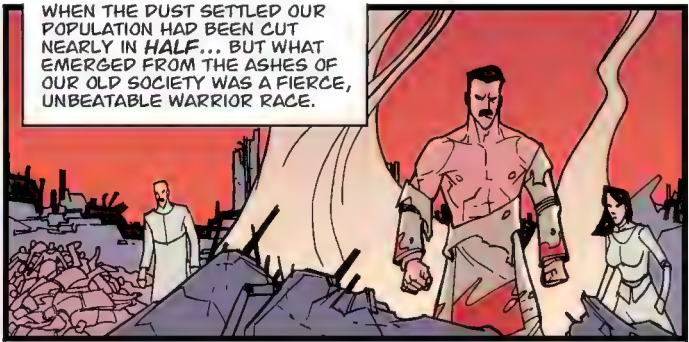
I AM FROM THE PLANET VILTRUM... THAT MUCH IS TRUE. ALTHOUGH, IT IS NOT THE PLANET THAT I HAVE TOLD YOU ABOUT SO MANY TIMES.

VILTRUM WAS A PLANET THAT HAD ACHIEVED A PERFECT GLOBAL SOCIETY... BUT IT DIDN'T HAPPEN OVER NIGHT.



IT WAS DECIDED THAT IN ORDER FOR OUR PEOPLE TO OBTAIN INTERGALACTIC DOMINANCE WE MUST ELIMINATE THE WEAK FROM OUR PLANET.

IT WAS A VERY MESSY PROCESS.



WHEN THE DUST SETTLED OUR POPULATION HAD BEEN CUT NEARLY IN **HALF**... BUT WHAT EMERGED FROM THE ASHES OF OUR OLD SOCIETY WAS A FIERCE, UNBEATABLE WARRIOR RACE.



ONCE OUR BATTLE-SCARRED PLANET HAD BEEN REPAIRED... WE SET OUR SIGHTS OUTWARD. IT WAS PROPOSED THAT WE BRING OUR NEW WORLD ORDER TO OTHER WORLDS.

OUR GOAL WAS TO ESTABLISH AND EXPAND A PLANETARY **EMPIRE**.



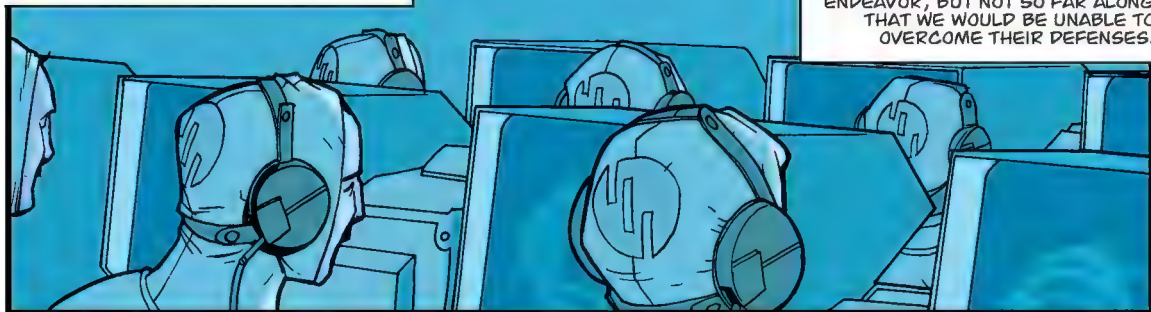
IT WAS AGREED UPON UNANIMOUSLY.

SHORTLY AFTER THE HIGH COUNCIL HAD APPROVED THE IDEA, THE WORLD CONQUERING COMMITTEE WAS FORMED.

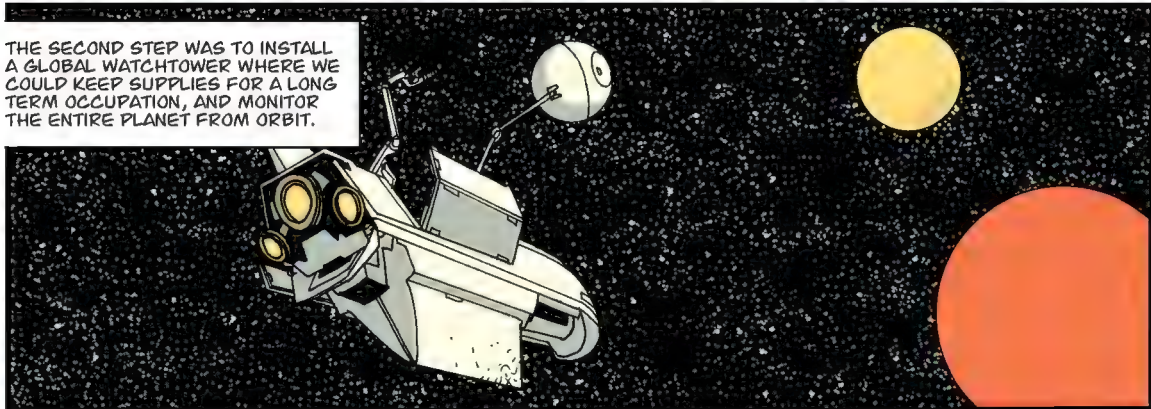


THE FIRST STEP OF THE INITIATIVE WAS TO LOCATE OTHER PLANETS THAT WERE IN A CRUCIAL STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT...

...PLANETS THAT WERE FAR ENOUGH ALONG THAT ADDING THEM TO THE EMPIRE WOULD BE A WORTHWHILE ENDEAVOR, BUT NOT SO FAR ALONG THAT WE WOULD BE UNABLE TO OVERCOME THEIR DEFENSES.



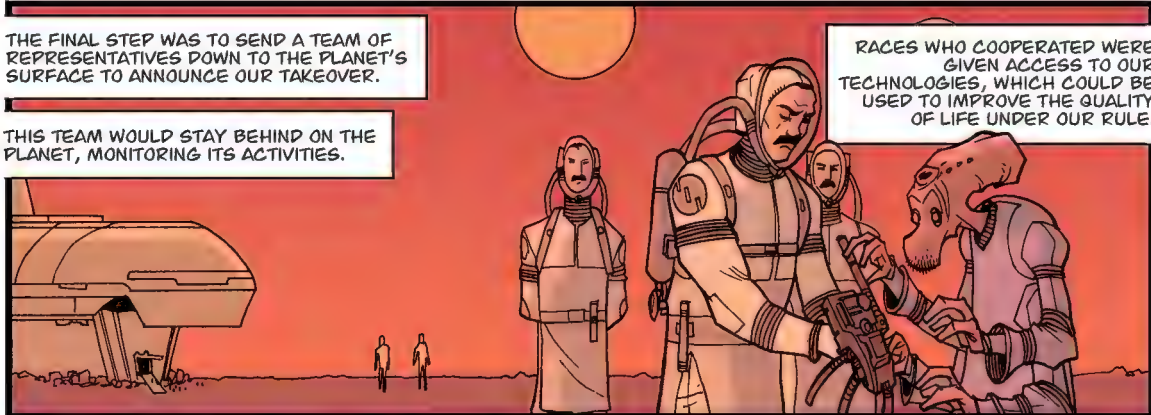
THE SECOND STEP WAS TO INSTALL A GLOBAL WATCHTOWER WHERE WE COULD KEEP SUPPLIES FOR A LONG TERM OCCUPATION, AND MONITOR THE ENTIRE PLANET FROM ORBIT.



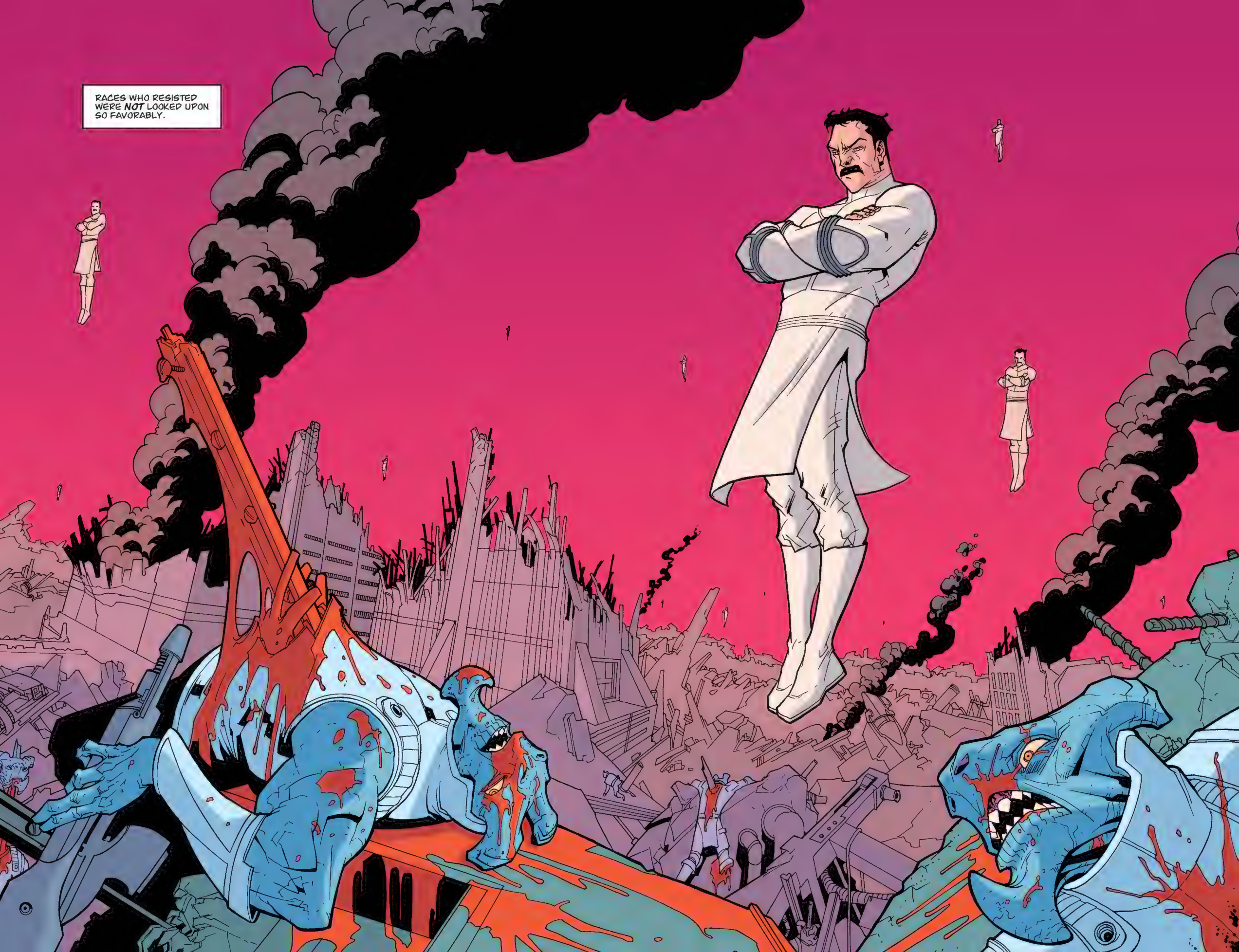
THE FINAL STEP WAS TO SEND A TEAM OF REPRESENTATIVES DOWN TO THE PLANET'S SURFACE TO ANNOUNCE OUR TAKEOVER.

THIS TEAM WOULD STAY BEHIND ON THE PLANET, MONITORING ITS ACTIVITIES.

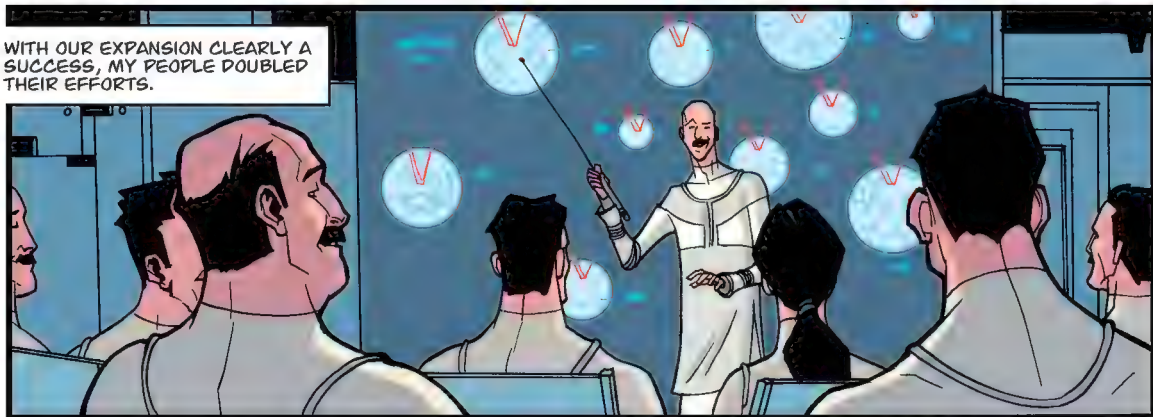
RACES WHO COOPERATED WERE GIVEN ACCESS TO OUR TECHNOLOGIES, WHICH COULD BE USED TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE UNDER OUR RULE.



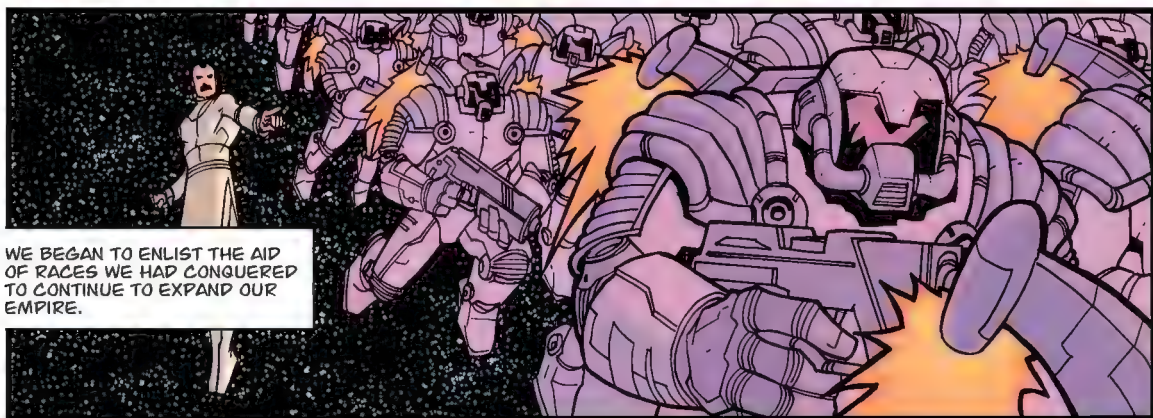
RACES WHO RESISTED
WERE **NOT** LOOKED UPON
SO FAVORABLY.



WITH OUR EXPANSION CLEARLY A SUCCESS, MY PEOPLE DOUBLED THEIR EFFORTS.



WE BEGAN TO ENLIST THE AID OF RACES WE HAD CONQUERED TO CONTINUE TO EXPAND OUR EMPIRE.

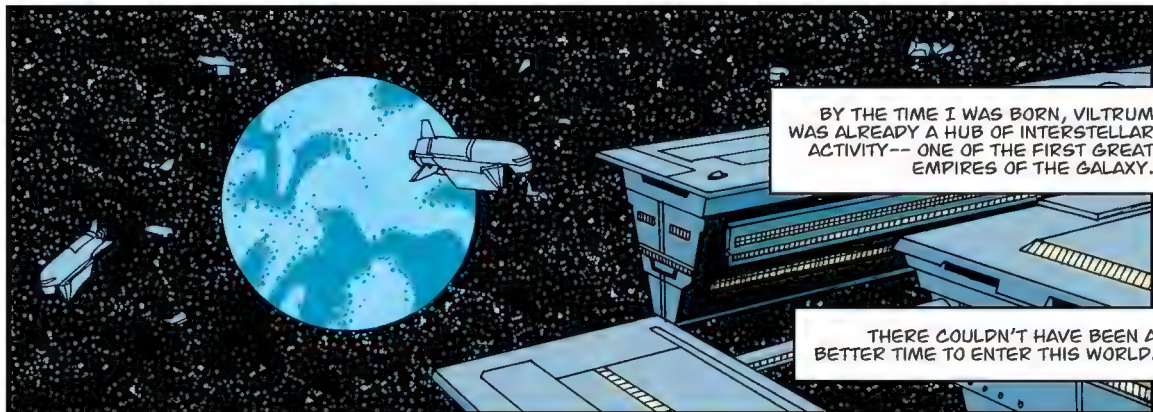


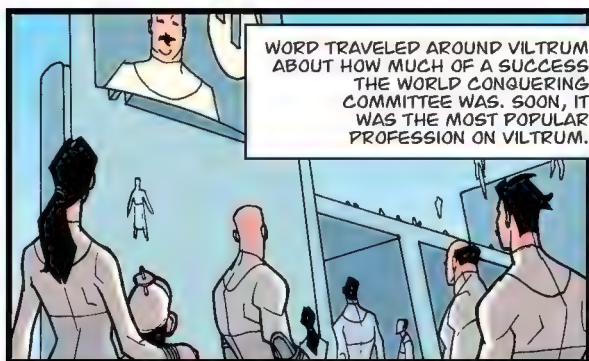
THOUGH THEY WERE NOT QUITE AS EFFICIENT AS OUR OWN FORCES... IT DID HELP WITH OUR EXPANSION EFFORTS.



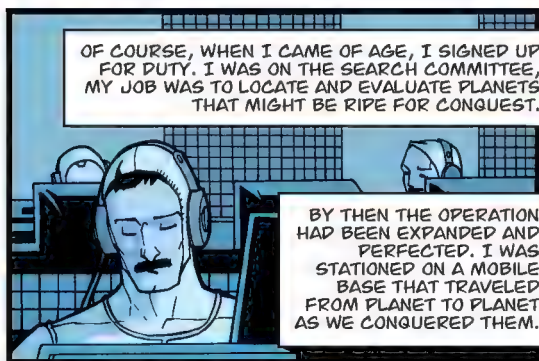
BY THE TIME I WAS BORN, VILTRUM WAS ALREADY A HUB OF INTERSTELLAR ACTIVITY-- ONE OF THE FIRST GREAT EMPIRES OF THE GALAXY.

THERE COULDN'T HAVE BEEN A BETTER TIME TO ENTER THIS WORLD.



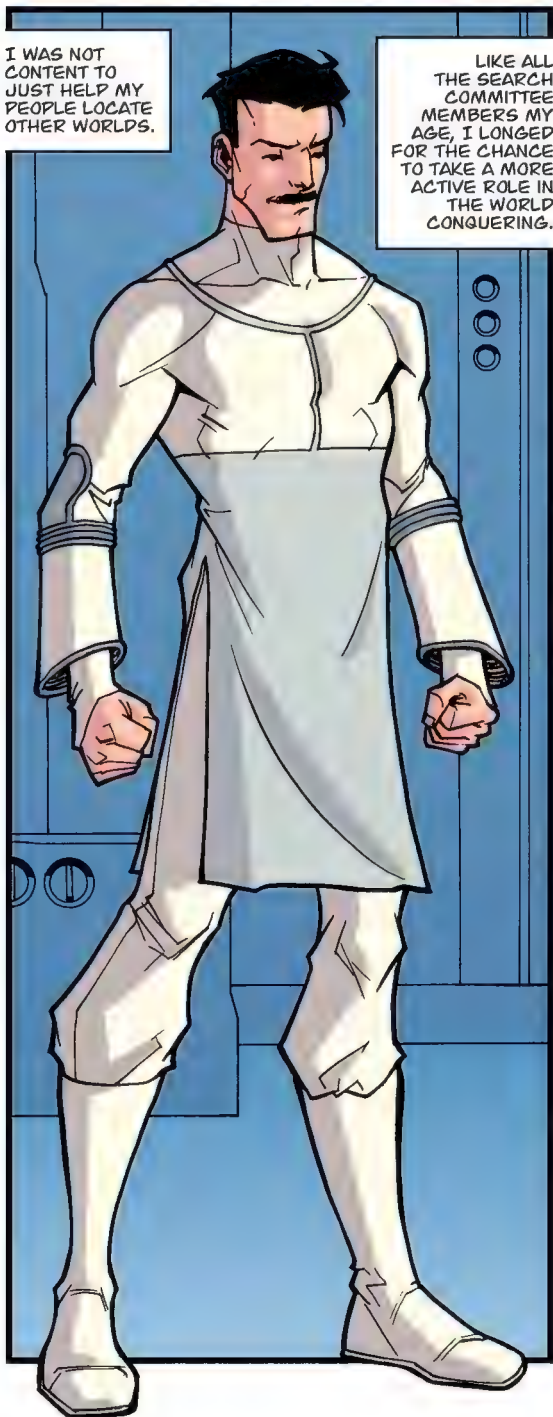


WORD TRAVELED AROUND VILTRUM ABOUT HOW MUCH OF A SUCCESS THE WORLD CONQUERING COMMITTEE WAS. SOON, IT WAS THE MOST POPULAR PROFESSION ON VILTRUM.



OF COURSE, WHEN I CAME OF AGE, I SIGNED UP FOR DUTY. I WAS ON THE SEARCH COMMITTEE, MY JOB WAS TO LOCATE AND EVALUATE PLANETS THAT MIGHT BE RIPE FOR CONQUEST.

BY THEN THE OPERATION HAD BEEN EXPANDED AND PERFECTED. I WAS STATIONED ON A MOBILE BASE THAT TRAVELED FROM PLANET TO PLANET AS WE CONQUERED THEM.



I WAS NOT CONTENT TO JUST HELP MY PEOPLE LOCATE OTHER WORLDS.

LIKE ALL THE SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS MY AGE, I LONGED FOR THE CHANCE TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN THE WORLD CONQUERING.



FOR THREE YEARS STRAIGHT I ATTENDED AUDITIONS UNTIL AT LAST... I HAD PROVEN MYSELF.



I HAD IMPRESSED THE HEADS OF RECRUITMENT SO MUCH THAT I GOT ONE OF THE BEST POSTS IN THE CONQUERING COMMITTEE.



I WAS STATIONED AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE EXPANSION EFFORTS... AT THE VERY EDGE OF OUR EVER-GROWING EMPIRE.

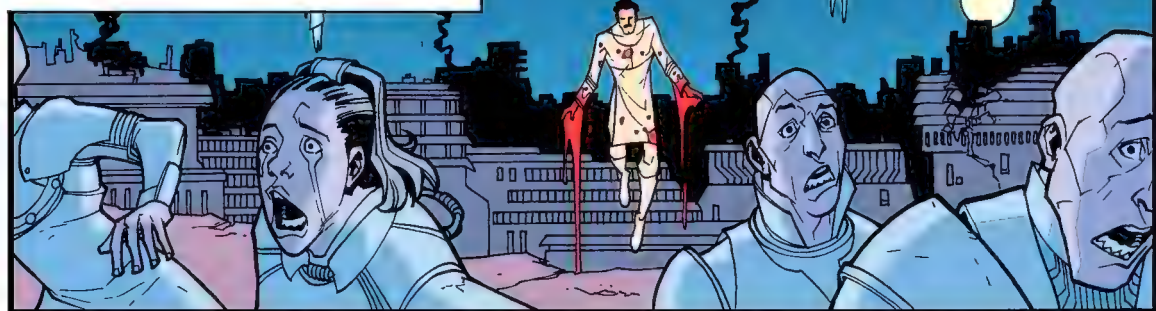
I THREW MYSELF INTO MY WORK.

IT WAS MESSY WORK... BUT I'D BE LYING IF I SAID I DIDN'T ENJOY IT. THERE WAS NOTHING I WOULDN'T DO FOR VILTRUM.

THERE STILL ISN'T.



AS WE MOVED ACROSS THE GALAXY ADDING CIVILIZATION AFTER CIVILIZATION TO OUR EMPIRE I QUICKLY ROSE THROUGH THE RANKS.



IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE I WAS LEADING MY OWN DIVISION.



IT DIDN'T MATTER IF IT TOOK ONE HUNDRED HOURS OR ONE HUNDRED YEARS. NO CIVILIZATION WE SET OUR SIGHTS ON WENT UNCONQUERED.



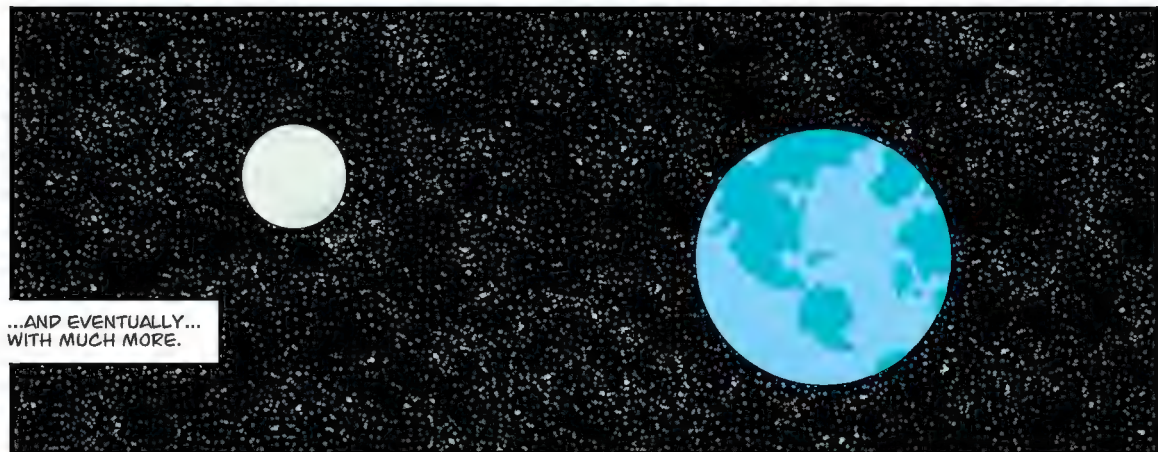


WE WERE UNSTOPPABLE.



OUR CONTINUED SUCCESS WAS PARTIALLY BECAUSE OF MY EFFORTS. FOR WHICH I WAS GREATLY REWARDED.

AT FIRST WITH AWARDS...



...AND EVENTUALLY...
WITH MUCH MORE.



AS OUR EMPIRE GREW, OUR
FORCES BECAME STRETCHED
TOO THIN JUST TRYING TO
MAINTAIN IT.

OUR EXPANSION SCREECHED
TO AN ABRUPT HALT.



IT WAS CLEAR THAT WE NEEDED
A MORE EFFICIENT METHOD OF
WORLD CONQUERING.

SO ONE WAS DEVISED.

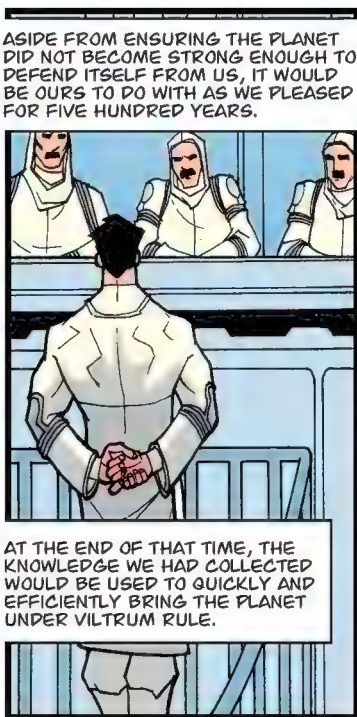


RATHER THAN COME IN LARGE NUMBERS
AND CONQUER A PLANET BY FORCE, OUR
HIGHEST RANKED AND MOST TRUSTED
OFFICERS WOULD BE ESSENTIALLY GIVEN
PLANETS TO SURVEY AND WEAKEN OVER
TIME.



I WAS ONE OF THE FIRST
CHOSEN FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT.

WE WERE TO ACCLIMATE
OURSELVES WITH THE PLANET'S
ENVIRONMENT... EVENTUALLY
BECOMING A MEMBER OF
SOCIETY.



ASIDE FROM ENSURING THE PLANET
DID NOT BECOME STRONG ENOUGH TO
DEFEND ITSELF FROM US, IT WOULD
BE OURS TO DO WITH AS WE PLEASED
FOR FIVE HUNDRED YEARS.

AT THE END OF THAT TIME, THE
KNOWLEDGE WE HAD COLLECTED
WOULD BE USED TO QUICKLY AND
EFFICIENTLY BRING THE PLANET
UNDER VILTRUM RULE.



IT WAS A PRIVILEGE TO BE GIVEN
THIS ASSIGNMENT-- A REWARD
FOR ALL MY HARD WORK.

IT WAS THE CLOSEST
THING TO A VACATION
THAT EXISTED ON
VILTRUM.

UPON MY ARRIVAL, I SPENT DAYS SURVEYING MY NEW HOME.



EARTH WAS A VIBRANT NEST OF INDIVIDUALITY THAT WAS VERY MUCH ALIEN TO ME.

AT FIRST I HATED IT... AND REGRETTED ACCEPTING THE MISSION.



IT WAS A STRANGE PLANET FULL OF STRANGE PEOPLE.



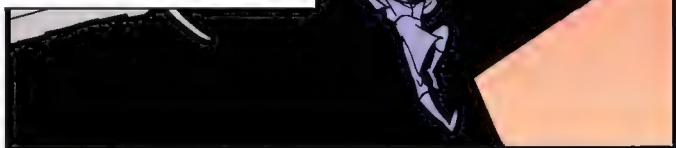
BUT IT WAS MINE.

IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE I REALIZED THIS WOULD BE NO EASY ASSIGNMENT.

HAD THE WORLD CONQUERING COMMITTEE KNOWN EARTH WAS SUCH A VOLATILE ENVIRONMENT, THEY MAY NOT HAVE CHOSEN IT.



IT SEEMED ITS PEOPLE WERE ALMOST ALWAYS IN SOME KIND OF DANGER.



EVERY TIME I TURNED AROUND THERE WAS A NEW THREAT OUT TO CONQUER THE PLANET BEFORE VILTRUM EVEN HAD A CHANCE.



WE HAD LAID CLAIM TO THIS PLANET... I WAS NOT ABOUT TO LET IT FALL TO ANOTHER INVADER.



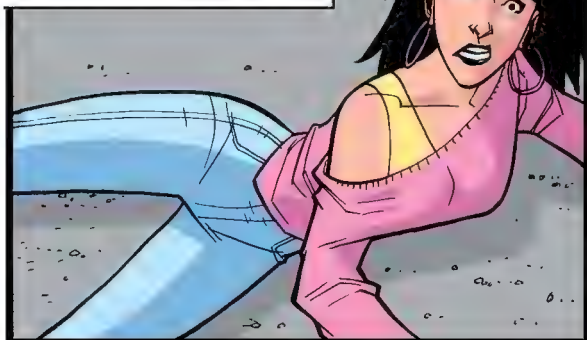
AFTER ONLY A FEW MONTHS, MY LIFE HAD SETTLED INTO A ROUTINE THAT INVOLVED LITTLE MORE THAN ENDING THREAT AFTER THREAT TO THE HUMAN RACE.



BUT ALL THAT WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE.



WHEN I MET YOUR MOTHER I
KNEW THE ONLY WAY TO ENJOY
MY TIME HERE WAS TO ACTUALLY
LIVE AS A HUMAN.



WHEN IT EVENTUALLY CAME UP...
I TOLD HER THE VERSION OF MY
COMING TO EARTH THAT YOU HAVE
BEEN TOLD SINCE CHILDHOOD.



IT WAS CLEAR SHE WOULDN'T
APPROVE OF THE REAL
REASONS I WAS HERE.

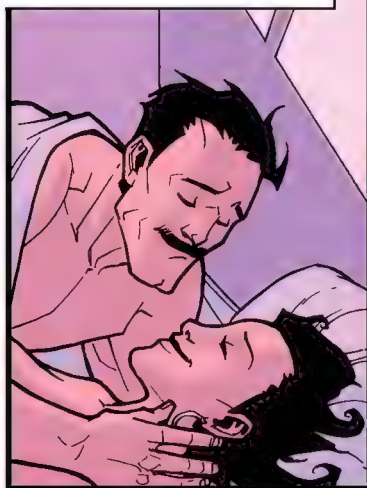
LIVING LIFE AS A HUMAN WAS NOT EASY AT FIRST.



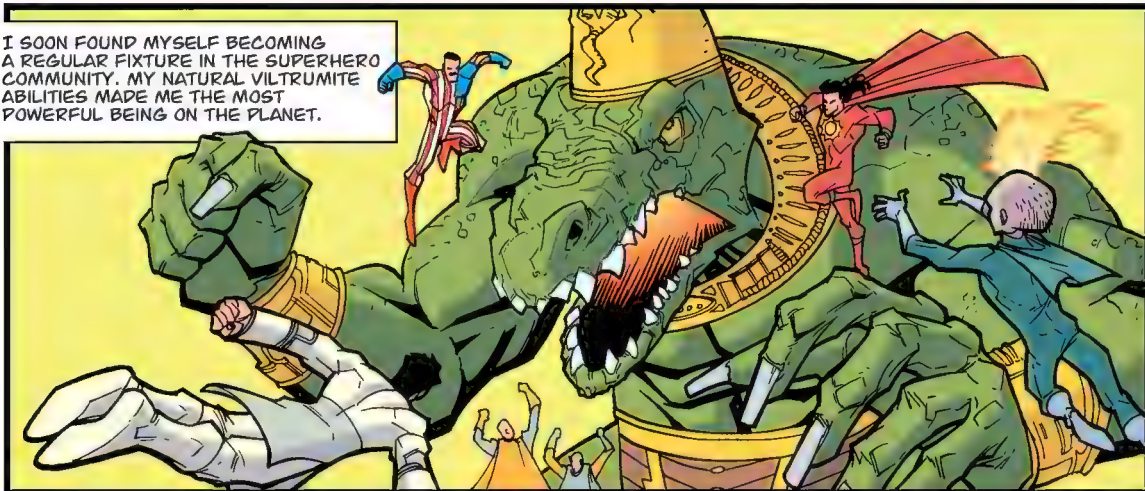
SIMPLE CONCEPTS LIKE MENIAL LABOR BEING REQUIRED TO EARN A LIVING WERE COMPLETELY ALIEN TO ME.



THOUGH, THE ACT OF PHYSICAL LOVE MADE FOR ANYTHING OTHER THAN PROCREATION WAS A WELCOME SURPRISE.



I SOON FOUND MYSELF BECOMING A REGULAR FIXTURE IN THE SUPERHERO COMMUNITY. MY NATURAL VILTRUMITE ABILITIES MADE ME THE MOST POWERFUL BEING ON THE PLANET.



I FOUND MYSELF ON ADVENTURE AFTER ADVENTURE. AFTER A TIME, I REALIZED THAT MY TRUE MOTIVES HAD BEGUN TO SLIP FROM MY MIND.



I WAS LIVING THE LIE A BIT TOO WELL.

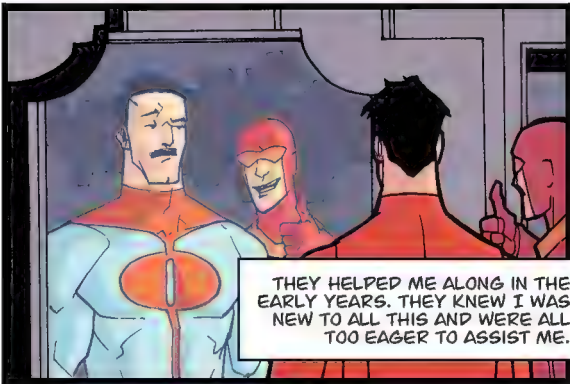


IT WASN'T LONG AFTER YOUR
MOTHER AND I MARRIED THAT
I FIRST RAN INTO THE
GUARDIANS OF THE GLOBE.





I NEVER BECAME AN OFFICIAL MEMBER BUT I WAS WELCOMED INTO THE FOLD WITH OPEN ARMS.



THEY HELPED ME ALONG IN THE EARLY YEARS. THEY KNEW I WAS NEW TO ALL THIS AND WERE ALL TOO EAGER TO ASSIST ME.



SOME OF THEM I WOULD EVEN EVENTUALLY COME TO CONSIDER FRIENDS.



BUT I KNEW THEY WOULD NEVER ALLOW ME TO COMPLETE MY MISSION.

I KNEW THAT THEY WOULD EVENTUALLY NEED TO BE ELIMINATED.

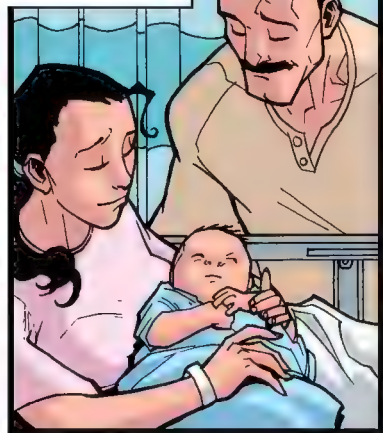
AS MY YEARS ON EARTH GREW LONGER...
I FOUND MYSELF BECOMING MORE AND
MORE COMFORTABLE LIVING LIFE AMONG
ITS INHABITANTS.

IT WAS SOMETHING THAT
WORRIED ME A GREAT DEAL.

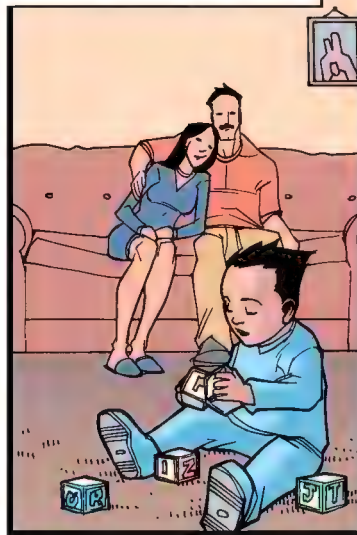


THEN EVERYTHING CHANGED.

YOUR MOTHER
WAS SO HAPPY...
I HAD NO CHOICE
BUT TO RAISE
YOU AS A HUMAN.



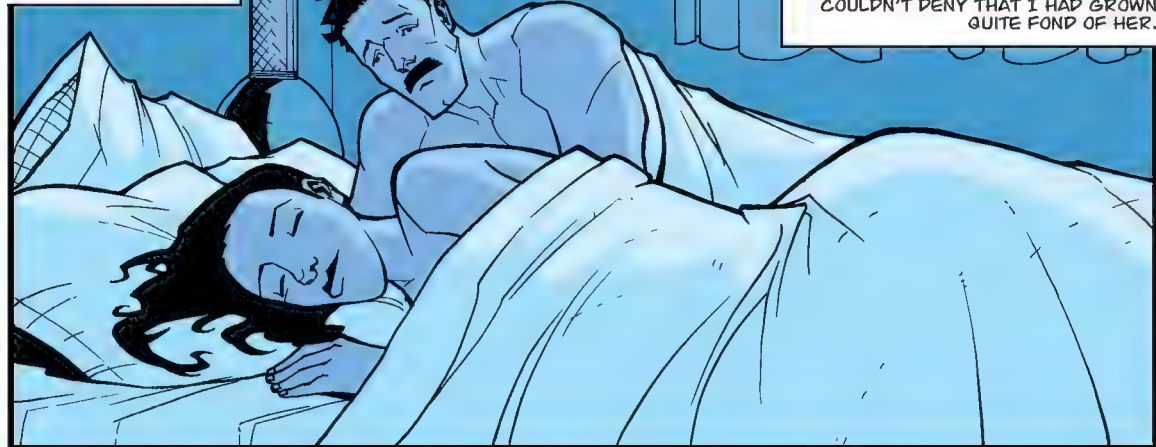
I COULDN'T RISK **HER** FINDING
OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT ME... SO
I COULDN'T RISK TELLING **YOU**
THE TRUTH ABOUT ME.



I OFTEN THOUGHT ABOUT
TAKING YOU... AND RAISING
YOU AS A VILTRUMITE IN A
SECLUDED AREA OF THE
PLANET.

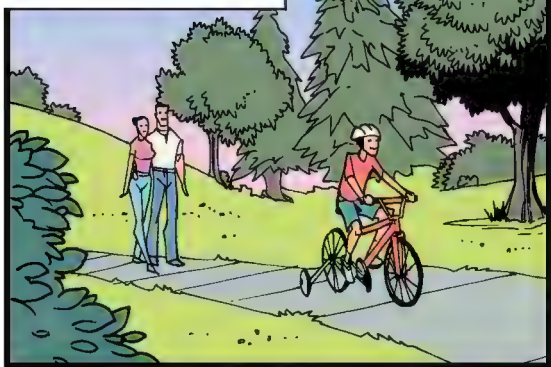


I COULD NEVER BRING
MYSELF TO DO IT.



NO MATTER HOW I TRIED TO DISTANCE
MYSELF FROM HER EMOTIONALLY... I
COULDN'T DENY THAT I HAD GROWN
QUITE FOND OF HER.

I DECIDED THAT FOR A TIME
I WOULD TURN MY BACK ON
MY DUTIES AND FOCUS ON
RAISING YOU.



I THOUGHT THAT YOU WOULD
BE ABLE TO PROVIDE A UNIQUE
PERSPECTIVE TO THE WORLD
CONQUERING COMMITTEE,
HAVING GROWN UP IN THIS
ALIEN ENVIRONMENT.



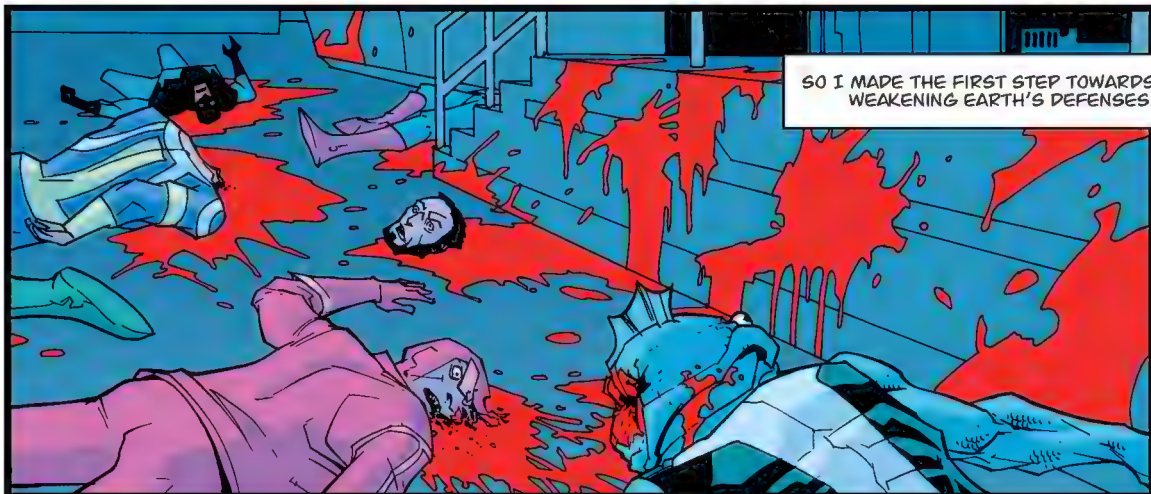
HONESTLY, I WAS HAPPY IN
MY NEW LIFE... BUT I KNEW
IT COULDN'T LAST.



WHEN YOU STARTED TO DEVELOP
YOUR POWERS... I KNEW I COULDN'T
WAIT MUCH LONGER.



SO I MADE THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS
WEAKENING EARTH'S DEFENSES.



...AND NOW IT'S TIME
FOR YOU TO JOIN ME
AND HELP ME PREPARE
THIS PLANET FOR ITS
IMMINENT TAKEOVER
AT THE HANDS OF
OUR PEOPLE.



I KNOW
THIS IS ALL
HARD TO TAKE
IN AT ONCE...
BUT OVER TIME...
IF YOU GIVE IT A
CHANCE...
YOU'LL BEGIN TO
UNDERSTAND.

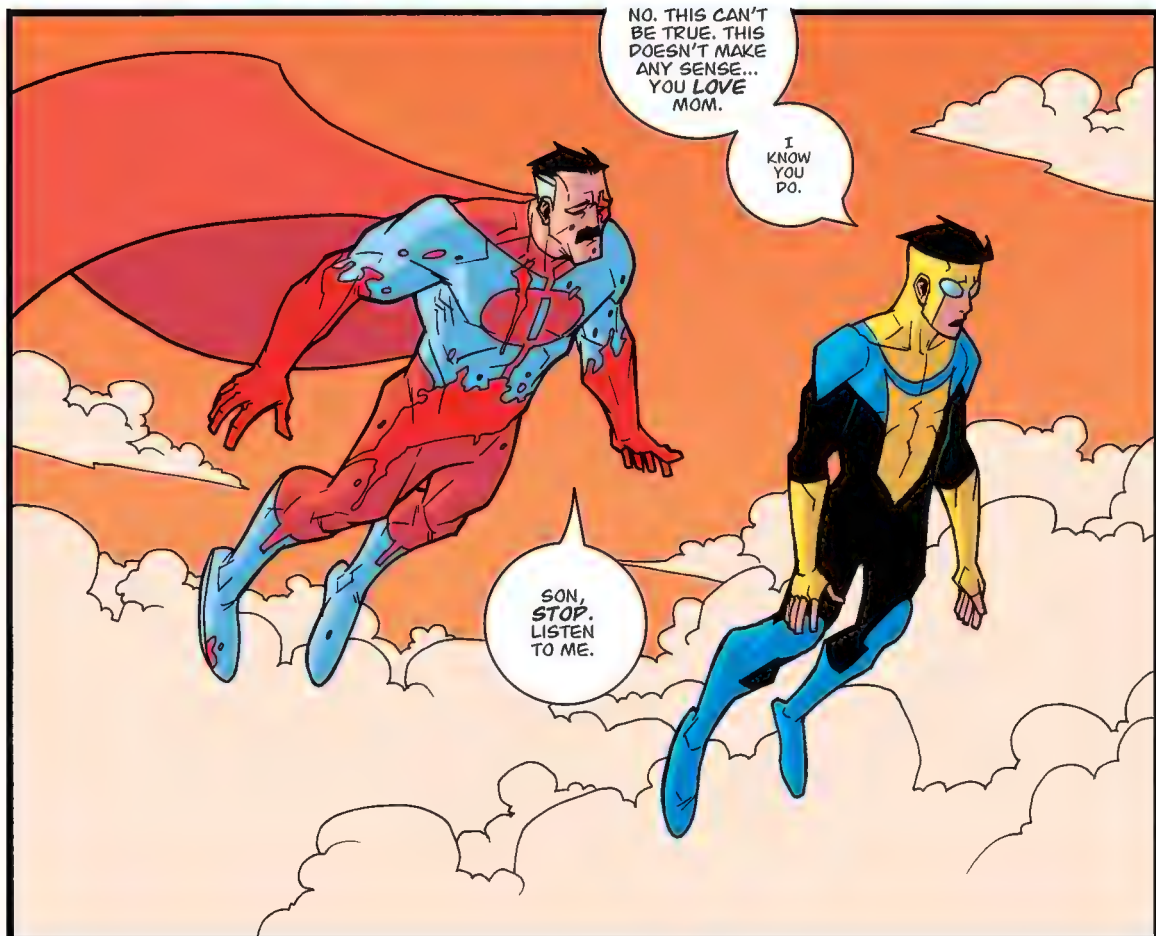
I'M SORRY
YOU HAD TO
LEARN ABOUT ALL
THIS UNDER THESE
CIRCUMSTANCES...
I TRIED TO TALK TO
YOU EARLIER. SEEING
THIS, I KNOW, IS NOT
THE BEST WAY TO
LEAD INTO THIS
SPEECH.



NO. THIS CAN'T
BE TRUE. THIS
DOESN'T MAKE
ANY SENSE...
YOU LOVE
MOM.

I
KNOW
YOU
DO.

SON,
STOP.
LISTEN
TO ME.





DO YOU HAVE ANY **IDEA** WHAT OUR LIFE SPAN IS? THE OLDER WE GET THE SLOWER WE AGE. WE CAN'T LIVE AMONG THESE FRAIL THINGS...

YOUR MOTHER IS LITTLE MORE THAN A PET.

VILTRUMITE DNA IS SO **PURE** AND COMPLETE THAT YOU ARE NEARLY FULL BLOODED. I COULD MATE WITH NEARLY **ANY** ALIEN BEING OF COMPARABLE EVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCE A SIMILAR OFFSPRING.



THIS MEANS YOU **WILL** EVENTUALLY BE AS STRONG AS ME. YOU COULD POTENTIALLY BE STRONGER... AND YOU WILL LIVE FOR **THOUSANDS** OF YEARS.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS MEANS?



EVERYTHING YOU KNOW AND LOVE WILL BE **GONE** BEFORE YOU LOOK THIRTY YEARS OLD. YOU DO **NOT** BELONG HERE.

DO YOU **REALLY** WANT TO WATCH YOUR WORLD **DIE** AROUND YOU?



I KNOW THIS IS CONFUSING, BUT EVERYTHING YOU KNOW IS **WRONG**. WE DON'T **BELONG** HERE... THIS WORLD IS **BENEATH** US... THESE PEOPLE ARE **BENEATH** US.

THIS PLANET AND ITS RESOURCES ARE VALUABLE TO THE VILTRUM EMPIRE. WITH YOU AT MY SIDE, WE COULD RULE THIS PLANET FOR **CENTURIES** BEFORE WE HAD TO TURN IT OVER.

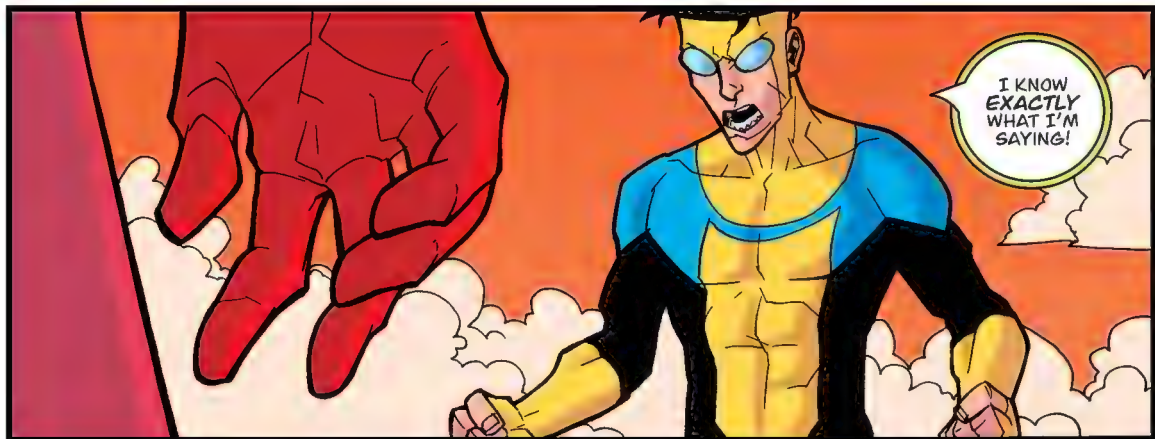
THINK ABOUT IT, SON. YOU MUST **REALIZE** THIS IS RIGHT.

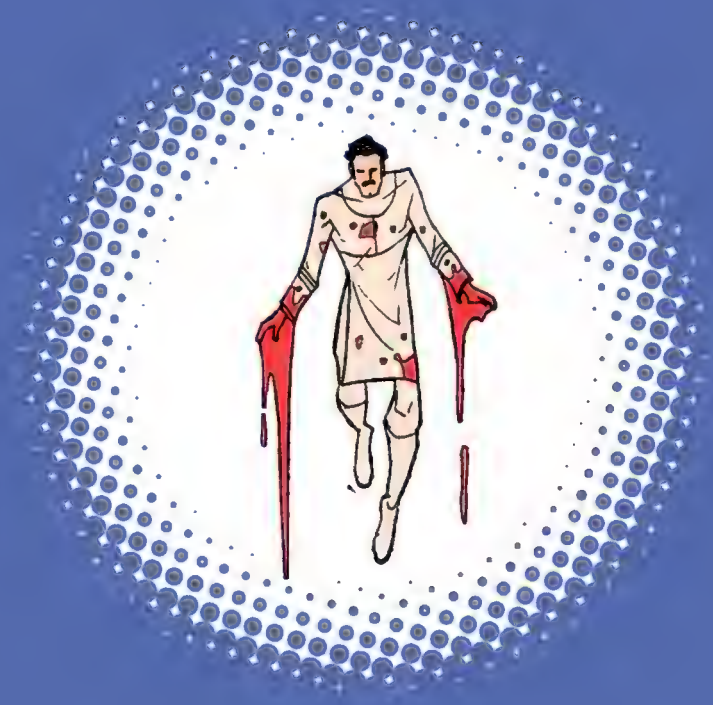


TRUST ME, SON. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY.







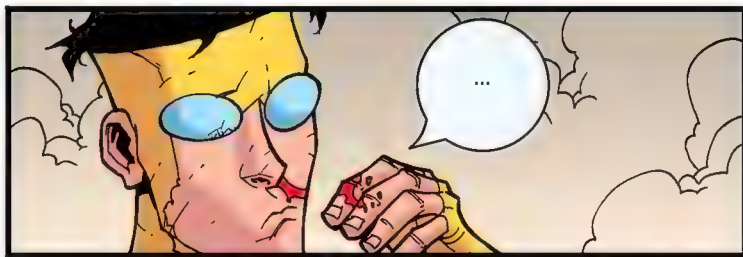
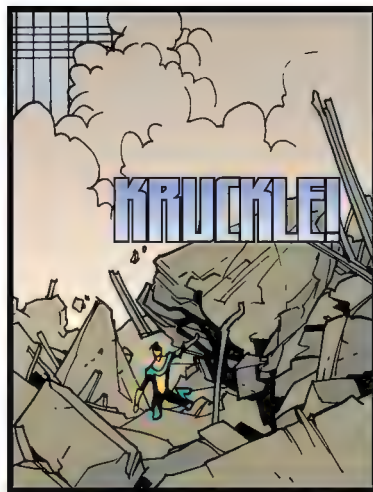


CHAPTER FOUR

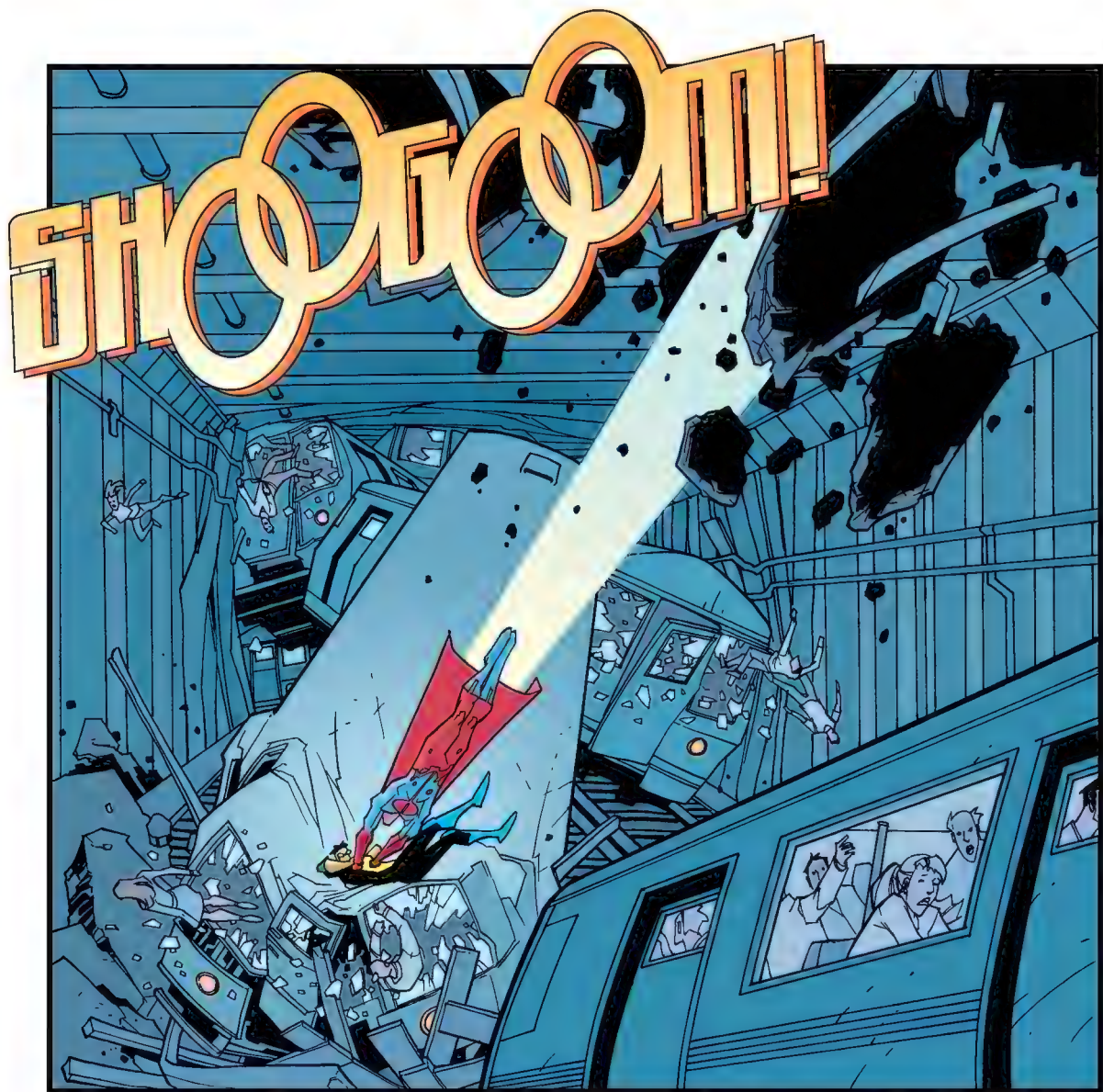


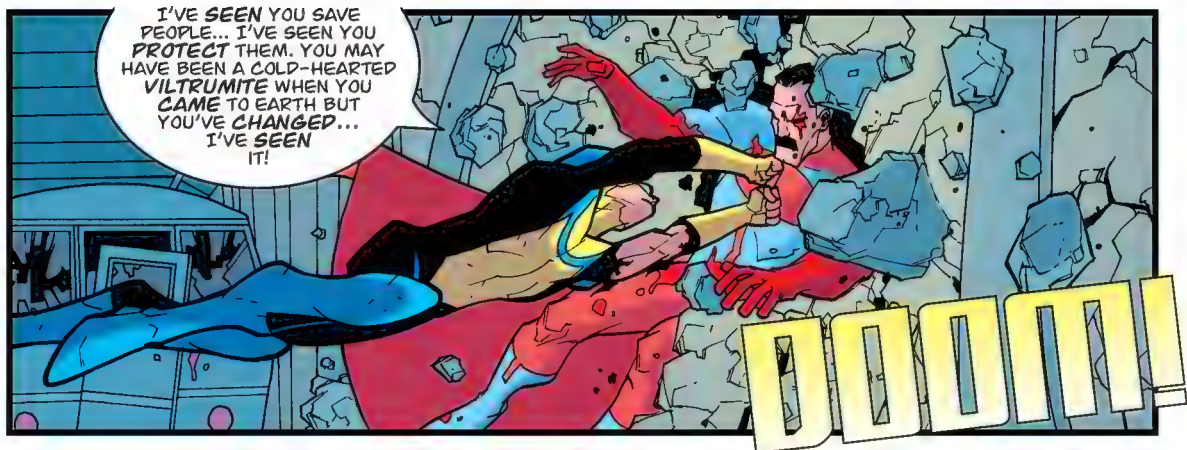


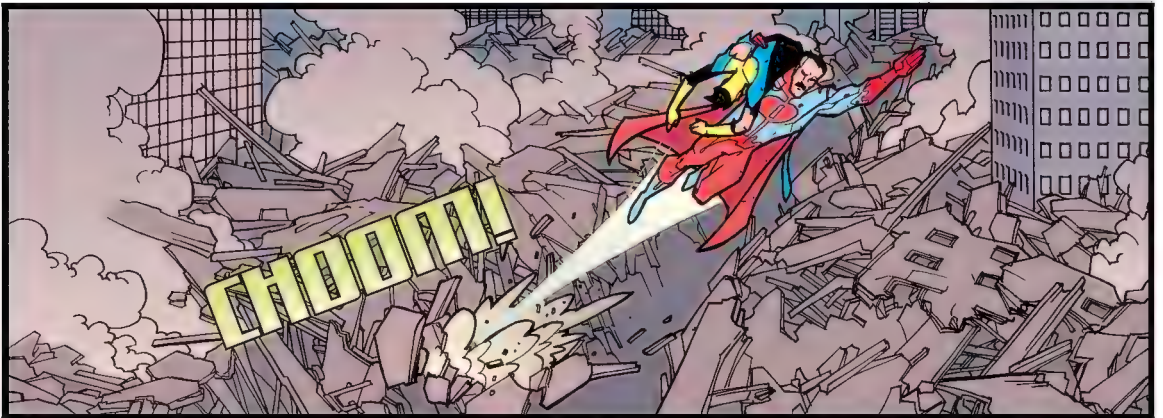
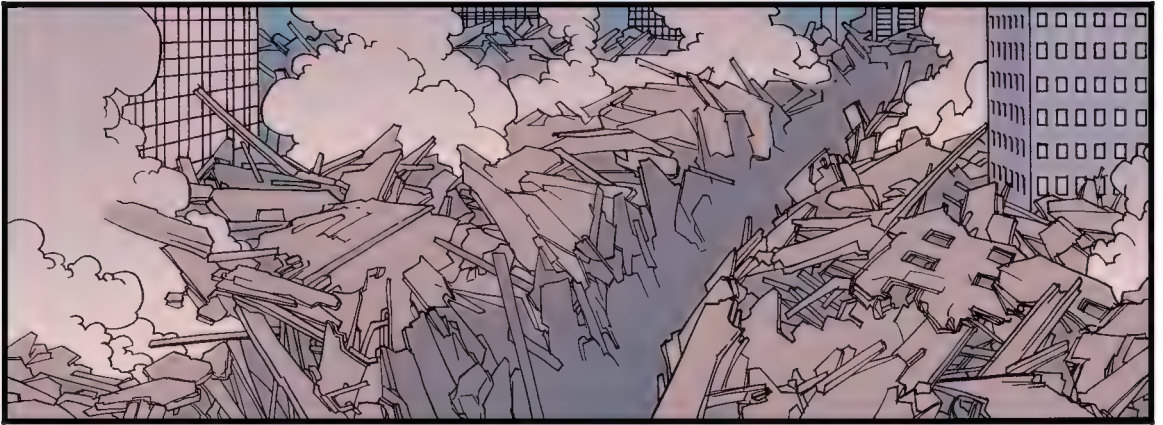




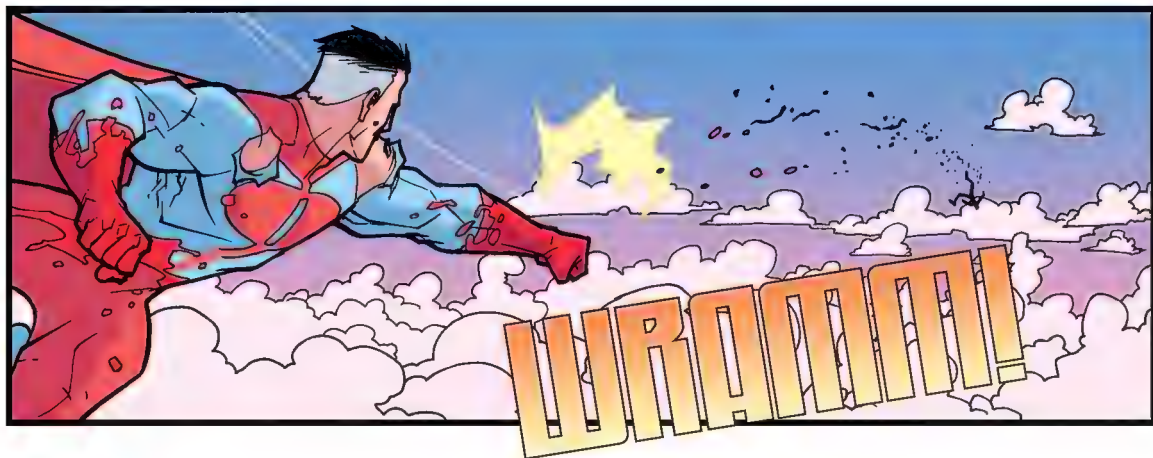
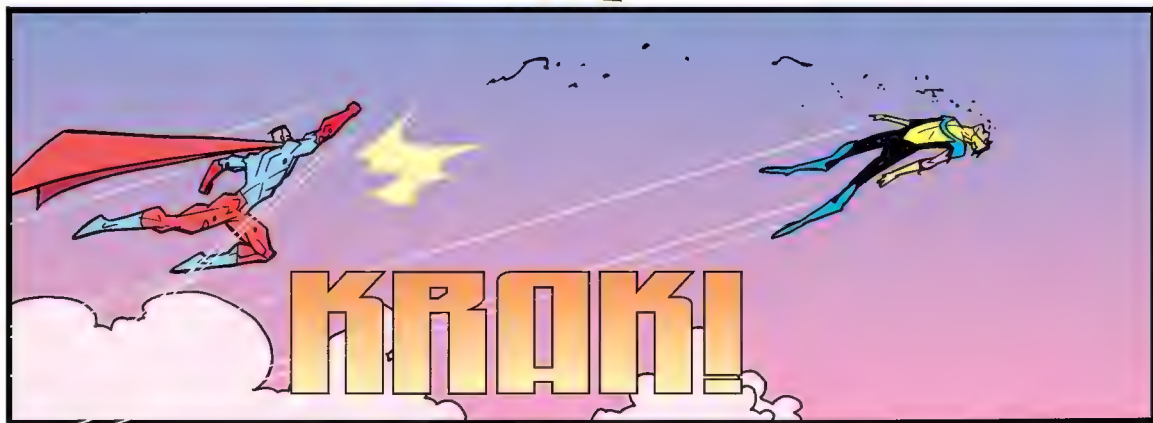
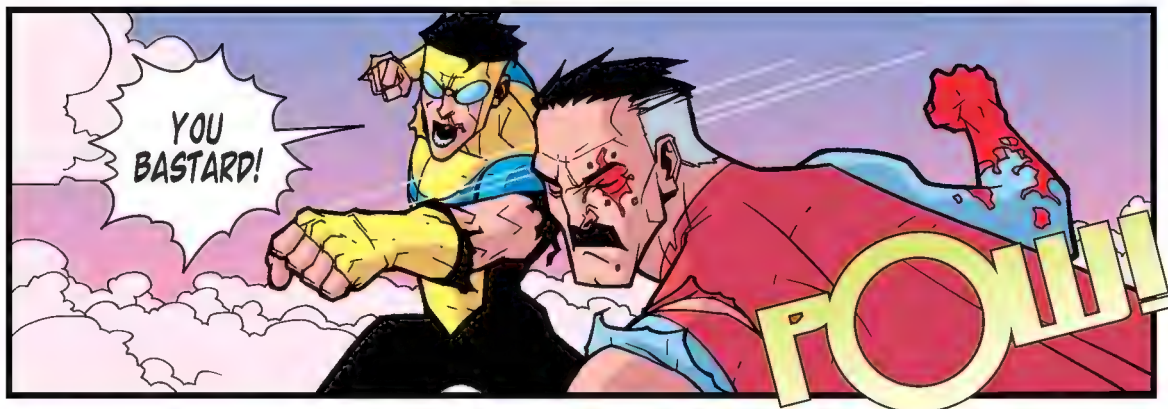


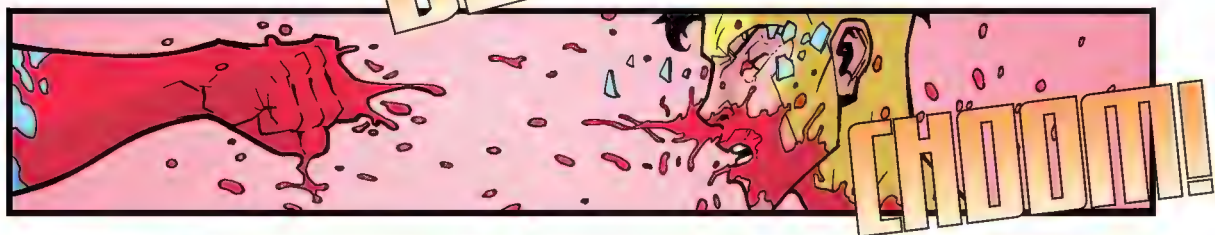


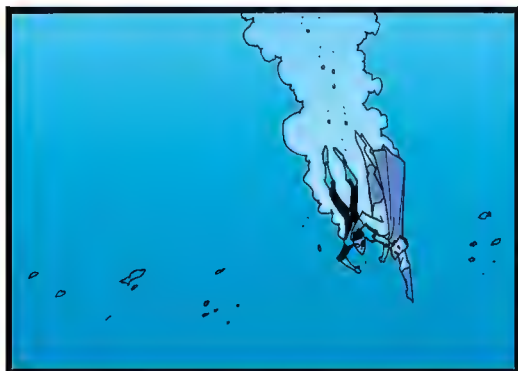
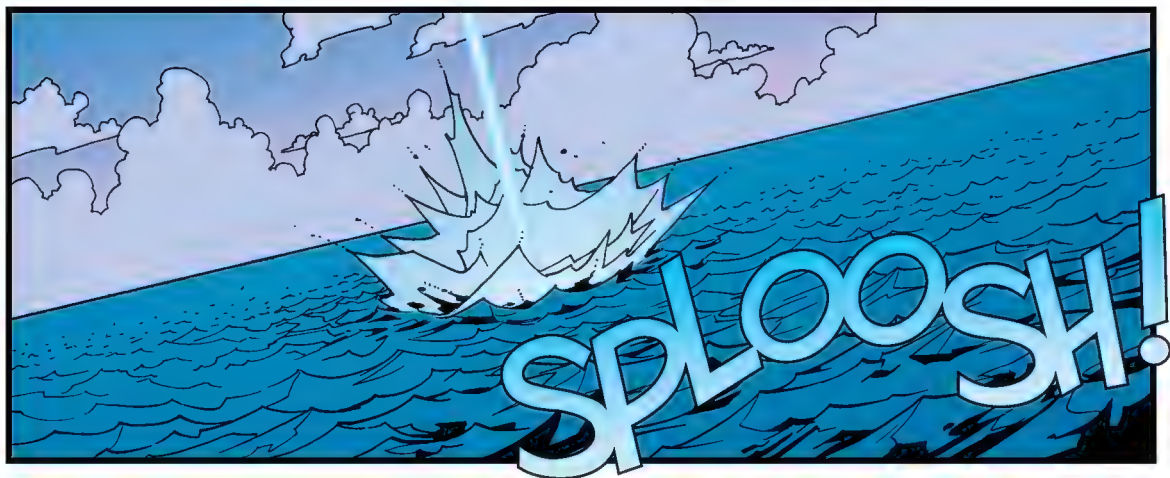


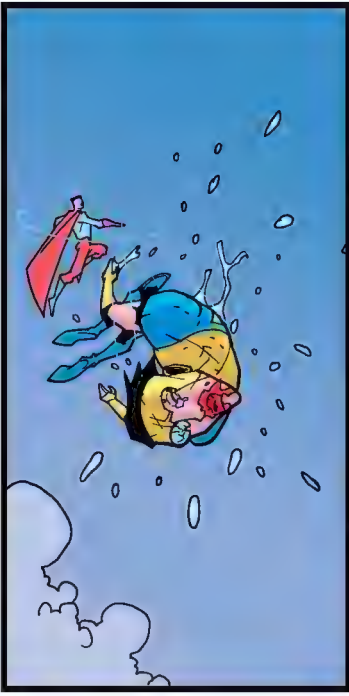
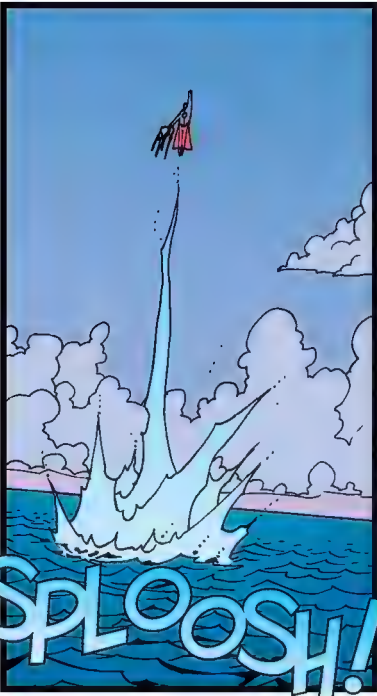
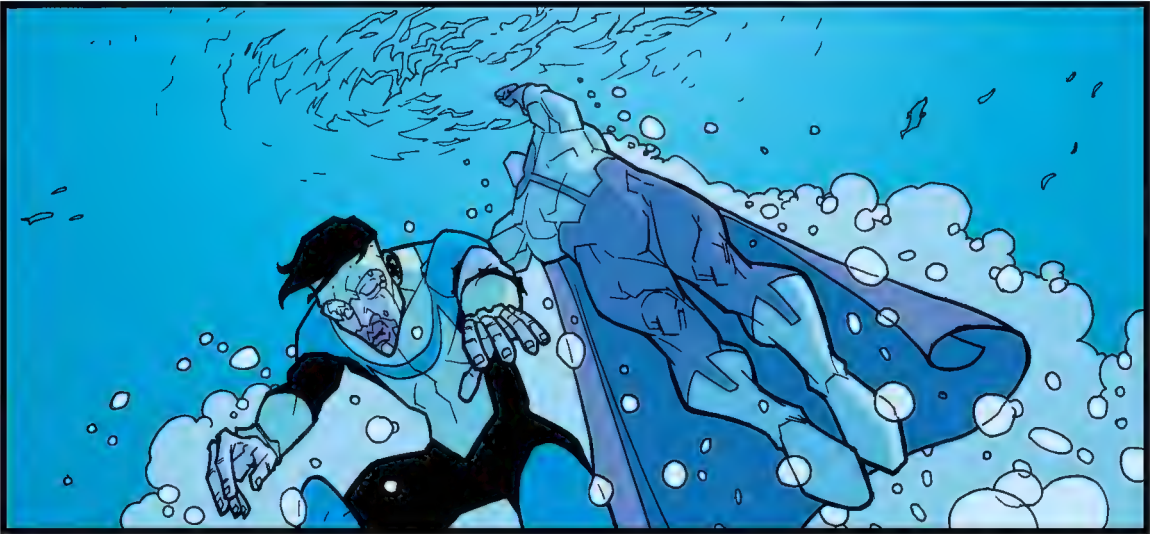




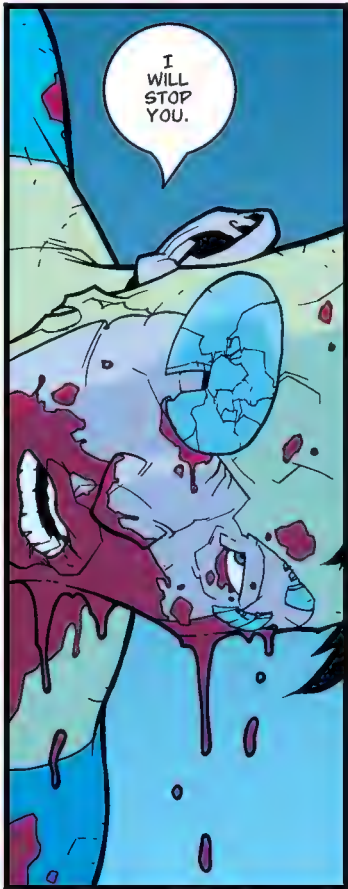
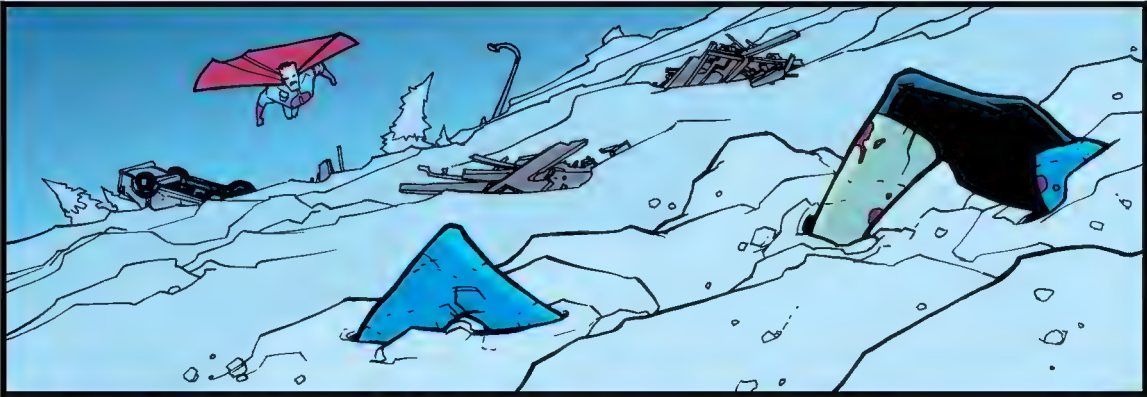




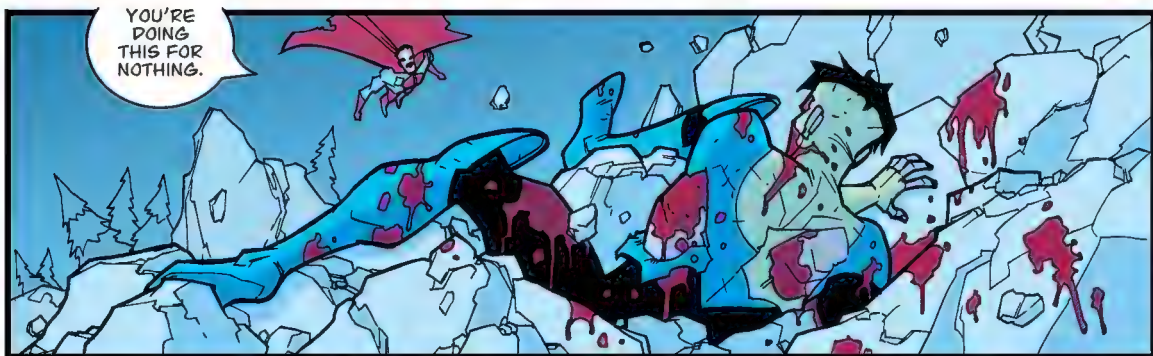
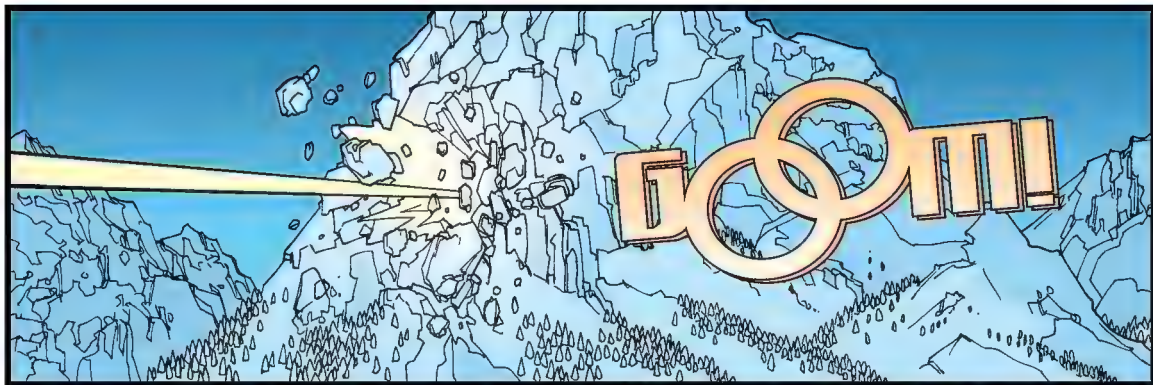








KRAK!











DAD?

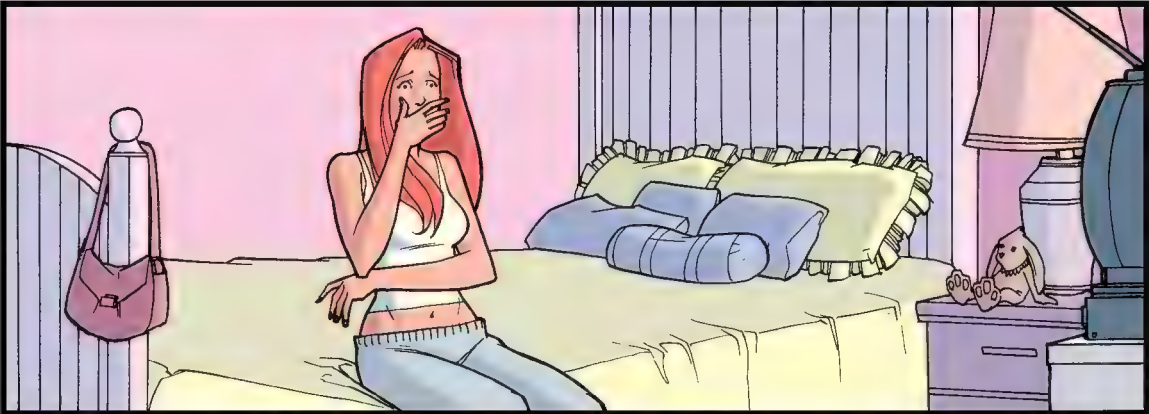
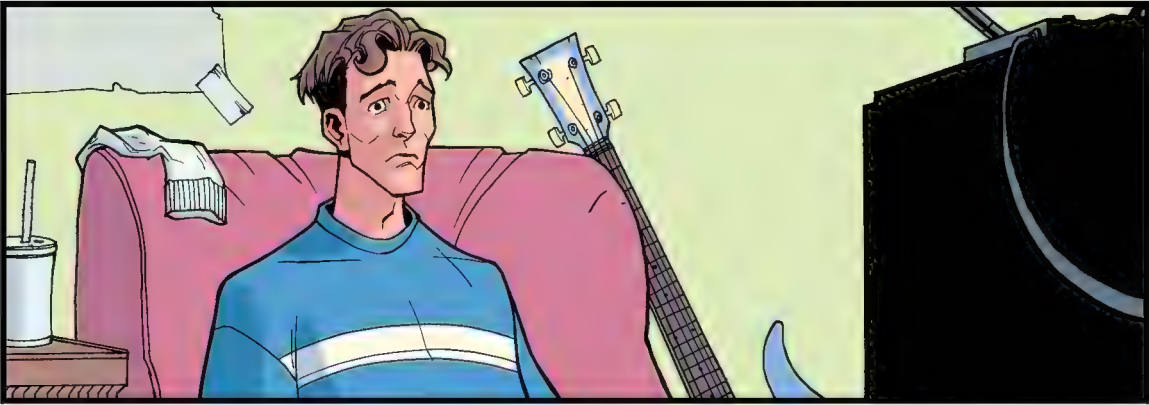


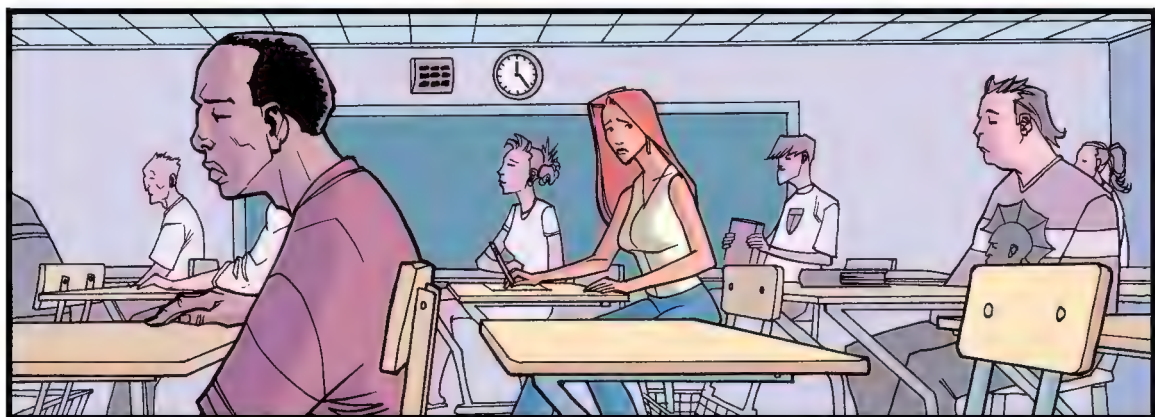
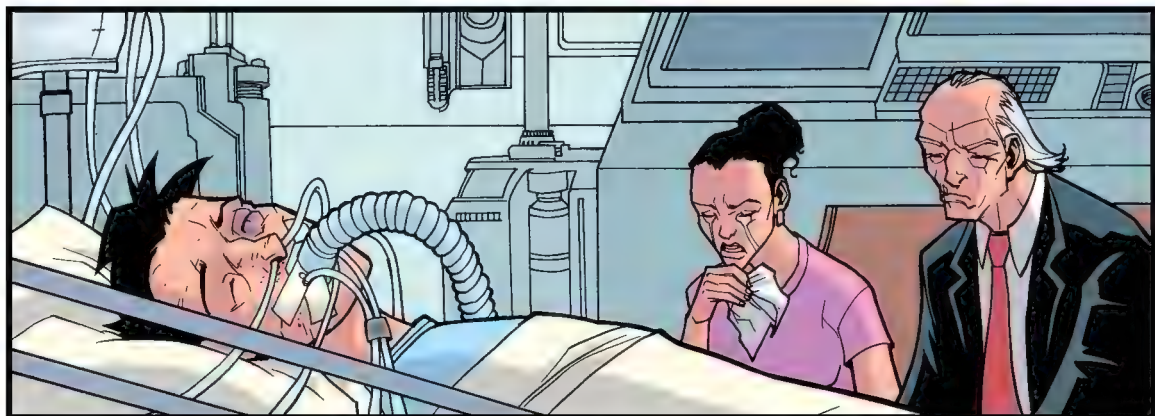
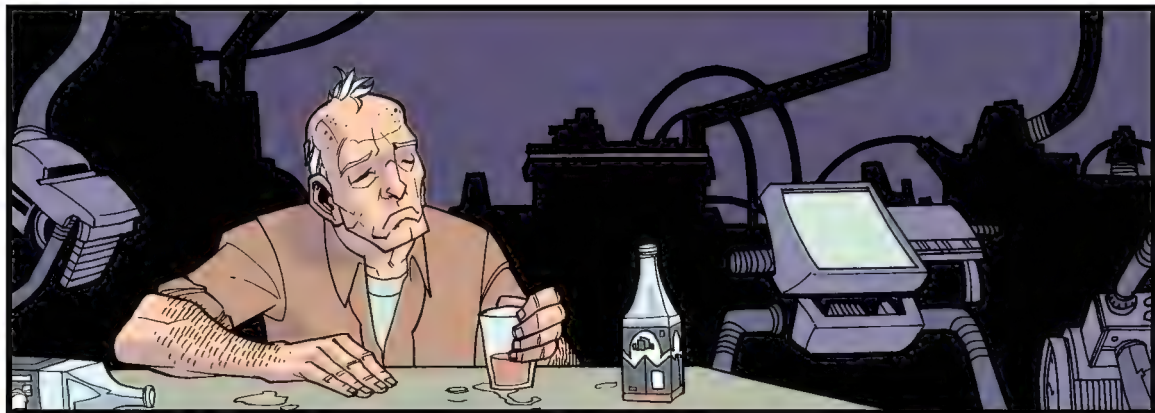


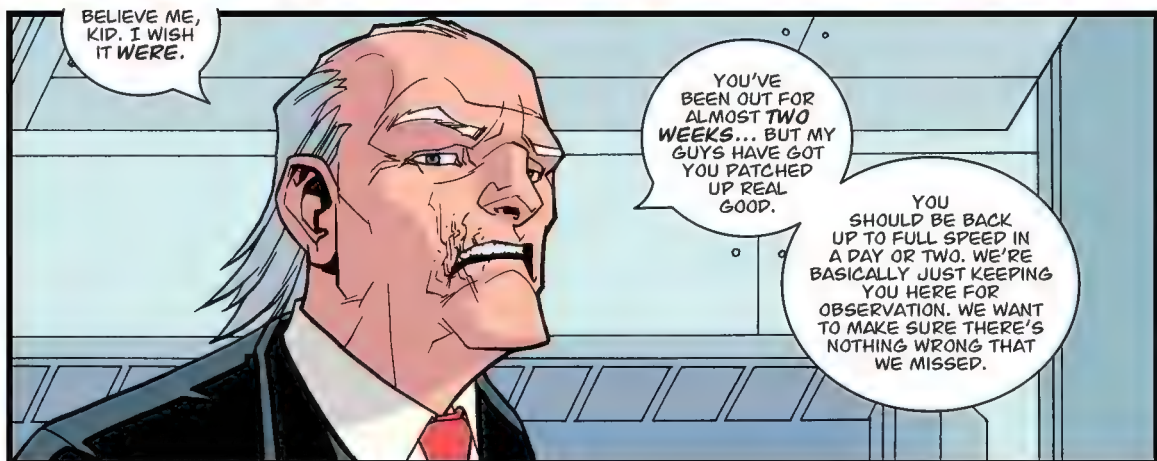
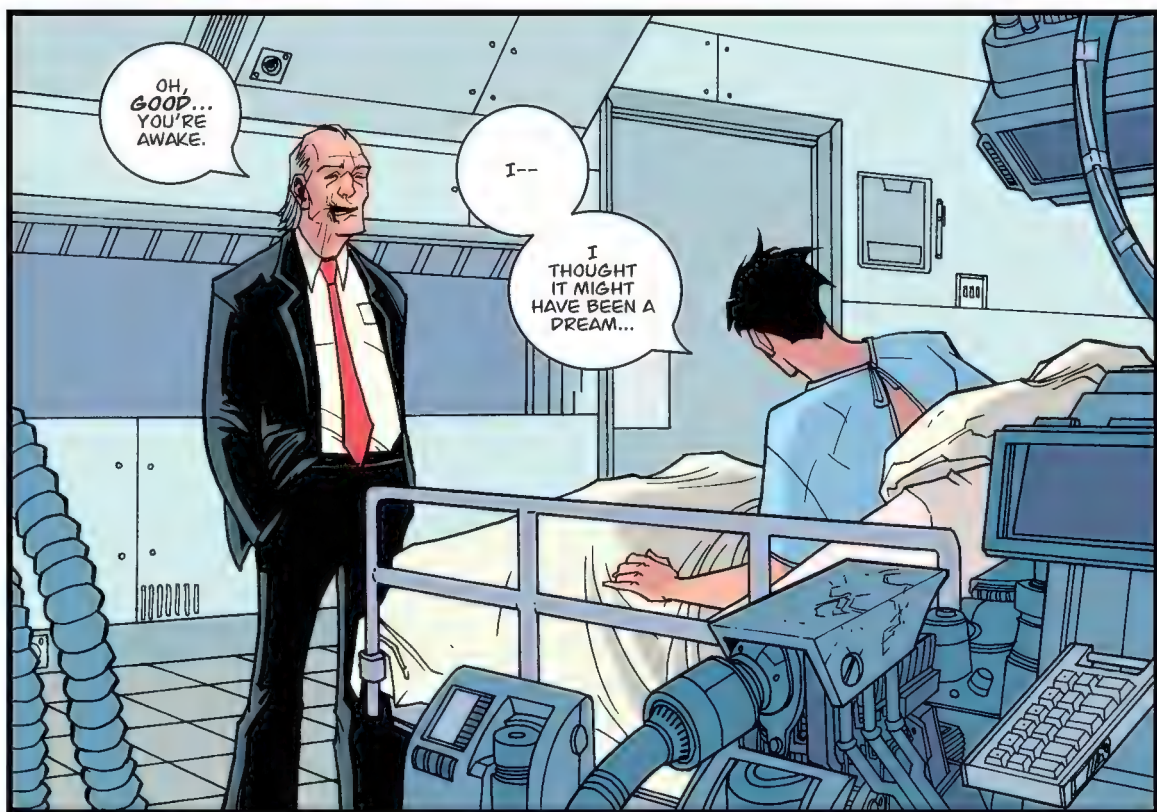
CHAPTER FIVE

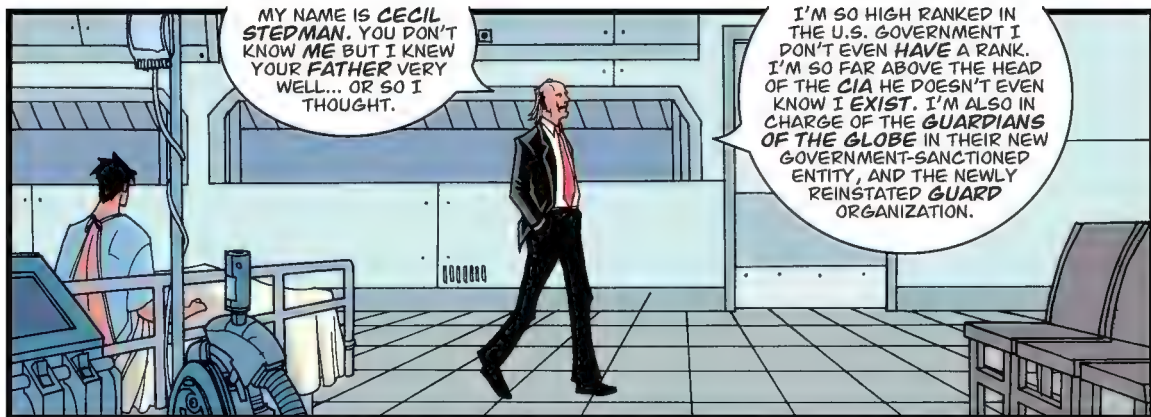






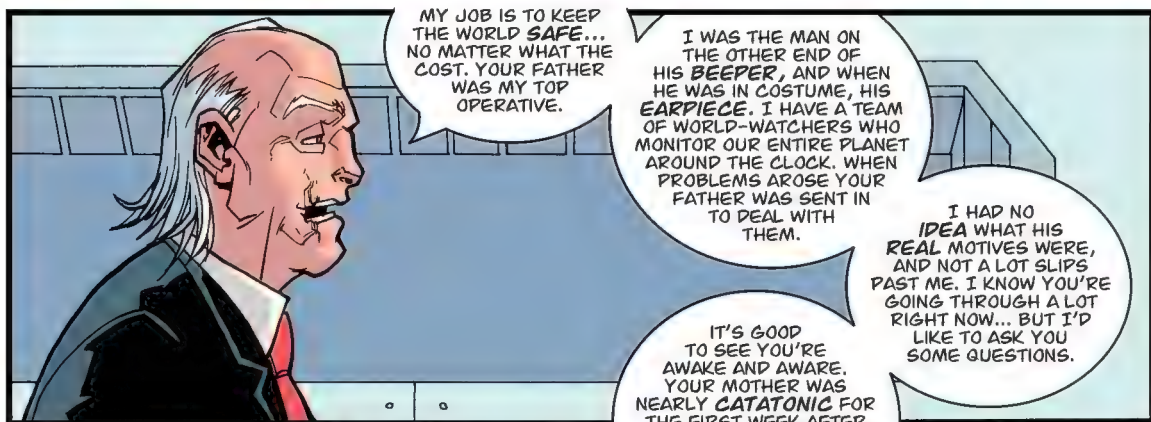






MY NAME IS **CECIL STEPMAN**. YOU DON'T KNOW ME BUT I KNEW YOUR FATHER VERY WELL... OR SO I THOUGHT.

I'M SO HIGH RANKED IN THE U.S. GOVERNMENT I DON'T EVEN HAVE A RANK. I'M SO FAR ABOVE THE HEAD OF THE CIA HE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW I EXIST. I'M ALSO IN CHARGE OF THE **GUARDIANS OF THE GLOBE** IN THEIR NEW GOVERNMENT-SANCTIONED ENTITY, AND THE NEWLY REINSTATED **GUARD** ORGANIZATION.

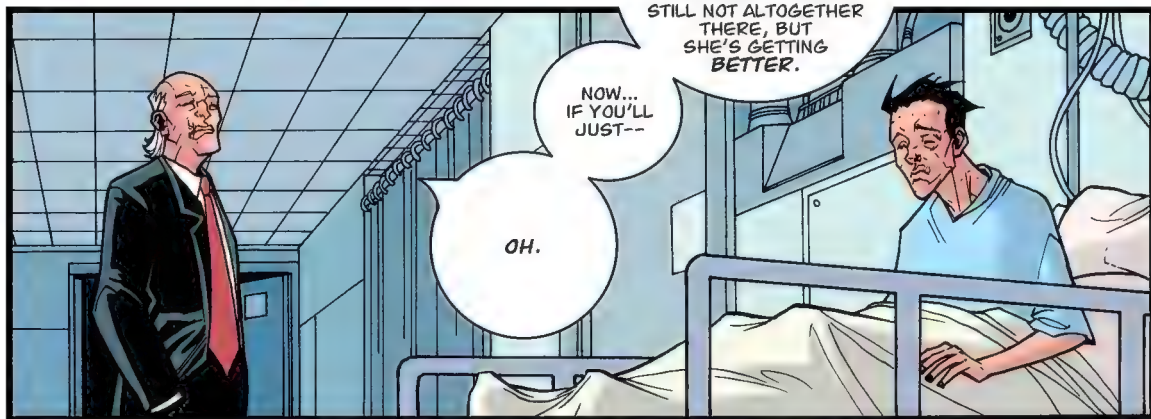


MY JOB IS TO KEEP THE WORLD **SAFE**... NO MATTER WHAT THE COST. YOUR FATHER WAS MY TOP OPERATIVE.

I WAS THE MAN ON THE OTHER END OF HIS **BEEPER**, AND WHEN HE WAS IN COSTUME, HIS **EARRPIECE**. I HAVE A TEAM OF WORLD-WATCHERS WHO MONITOR OUR ENTIRE PLANET AROUND THE CLOCK. WHEN PROBLEMS AROSE YOUR FATHER WAS SENT IN TO DEAL WITH THEM.

I HAD NO IDEA WHAT HIS **REAL** MOTIVES WERE, AND NOT A LOT SLIPS PAST ME. I KNOW YOU'RE GOING THROUGH A LOT RIGHT NOW... BUT I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS.

IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU'RE AWAKE AND AWARE. YOUR MOTHER WAS NEARLY **CATATONIC** FOR THE FIRST WEEK AFTER THE EVENT... SHE'S STILL NOT ALTOGETHER THERE, BUT SHE'S GETTING BETTER.



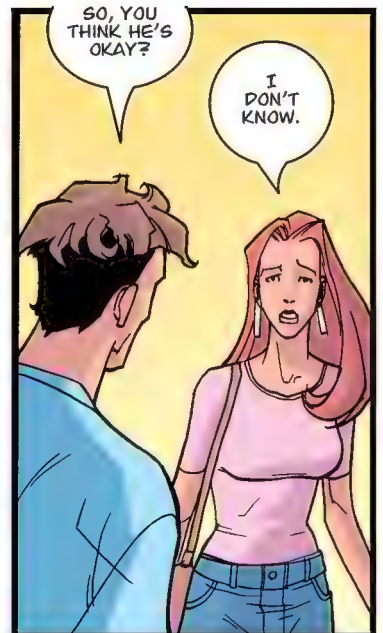
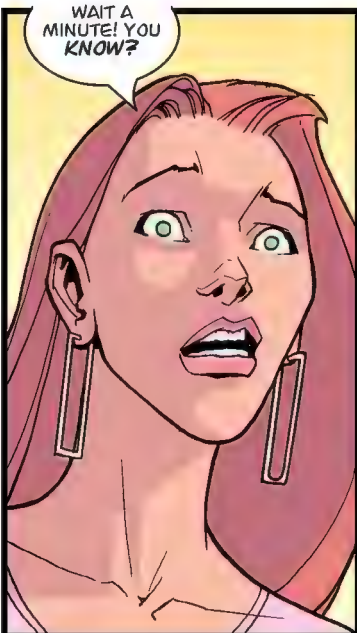
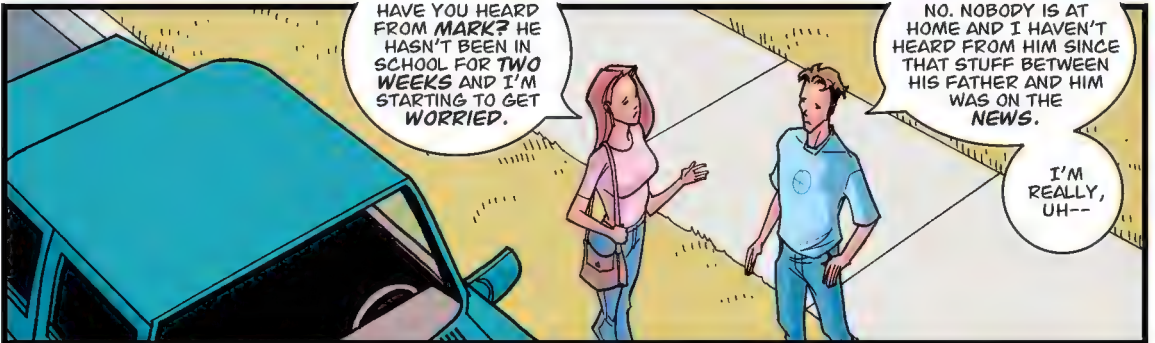
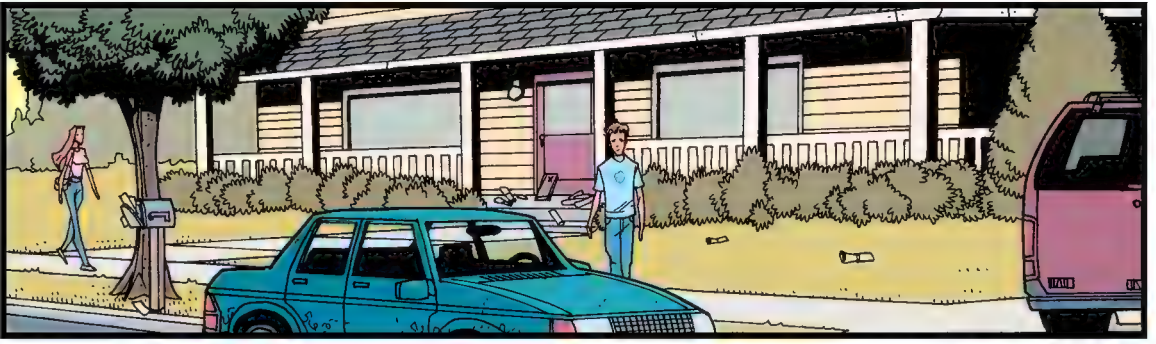
NOW... IF YOU'LL JUST--

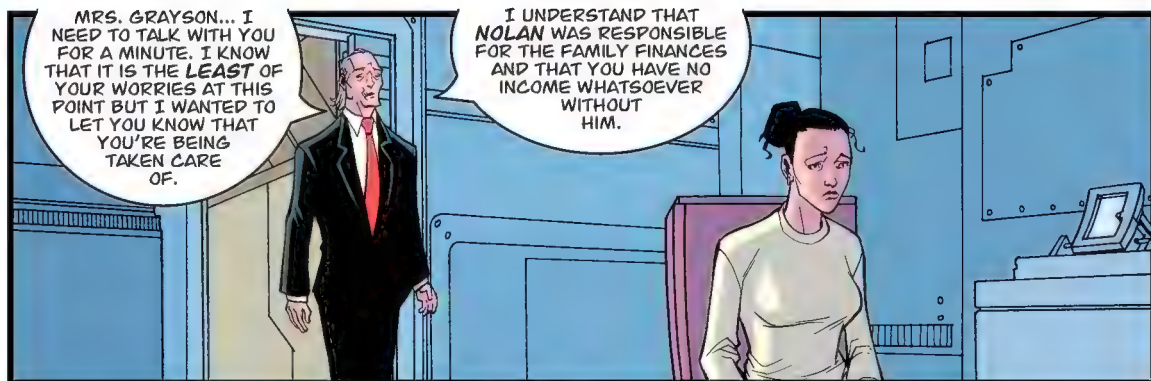
OH.



ANOTHER TIME THEN.

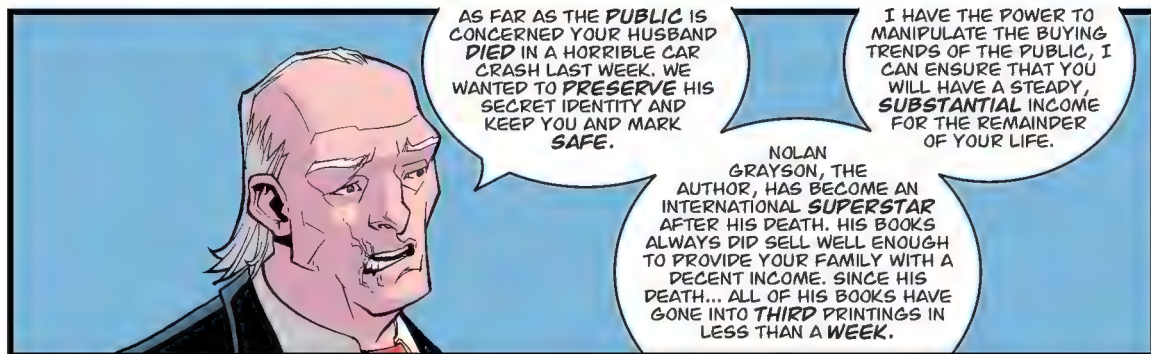
SORRY TO BOTHER.





MRS. GRAYSON... I NEED TO TALK WITH YOU FOR A MINUTE. I KNOW THAT IT IS THE **LEAST** OF YOUR WORRIES AT THIS POINT BUT I WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE BEING TAKEN CARE OF.

I UNDERSTAND THAT **NOLAN** WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FAMILY FINANCES AND THAT YOU HAVE NO INCOME WHATSOEVER WITHOUT HIM.



AS FAR AS THE **PUBLIC** IS CONCERNED YOUR HUSBAND **DIED** IN A HORRIBLE CAR CRASH LAST WEEK. WE WANTED TO **PRESERVE** HIS SECRET IDENTITY AND KEEP YOU AND MARK **SAFE**.

I HAVE THE POWER TO MANIPULATE THE BUYING TRENDS OF THE PUBLIC, I CAN ENSURE THAT YOU WILL HAVE A STEADY, **SUBSTANTIAL** INCOME FOR THE REMAINDER OF YOUR LIFE.

NOLAN GRAYSON, THE AUTHOR, HAS BECOME AN INTERNATIONAL **SUPERSTAR** AFTER HIS DEATH. HIS BOOKS ALWAYS DID SELL WELL ENOUGH TO PROVIDE YOUR FAMILY WITH A DECENT INCOME. SINCE HIS DEATH... ALL OF HIS BOOKS HAVE GONE INTO **THIRD** PRINTINGS IN LESS THAN A WEEK.



A **PROXY** HAS ATTENDED A FAUX FUNERAL, AND BEEN INTERVIEWED BY THE PRESS. DO NOT BE ALARMED IF YOU SEE YOURSELF ON THE NEWS. OUR **HOLOGRAPHICS** DIVISION IS SECOND TO **NONE**.

THIS HAS BEEN DONE TO ENSURE THAT WHEN YOU ARE **READY**... YOU AND YOUR SON CAN RETURN TO YOUR **HOME** AND RESUME YOUR DAILY LIVES... WITH AS LITTLE **ADDITIONAL** PROBLEMS TO DEAL WITH AS POSSIBLE.

I KNOW THIS IS ALL A LITTLE **OVERWHELMING** AND I APOLOGIZE FOR ALL THAT'S GONE ON... I JUST HOPE THAT I CAN **HELP** YOU IN SOME SMALL WAY--

WHY?



WHY ARE YOU **DOING** ALL THIS?

BECAUSE I FEEL **RESPONSIBLE** FOR YOUR HUSBAND'S ACTIONS. HE WAS DOING **ALL** THIS RIGHT UNDER MY **NOSE**... AND I NEVER SAW IT.

I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO **LIVE** WITH MYSELF IF I DIDN'T DO **EVERYTHING** IN MY POWER TO MAKE THINGS AS RIGHT AS THEY CAN BE.

AND MY **POWER** IS VAST.



OH, GOOD...
YOU'RE HERE.
I DIDN'T KNOW
IF YOU WOULD
BE.

WE HAVE
BEEN USING THIS
BASE AS A TEMPORARY
HEADQUARTERS UNTIL
THE GOVERNMENT CAN
SECURE US A MORE
SUITABLE
FACILITY.

THE
FORMER
GUARDIANS OF
THE GLOBE
HEADQUARTERS IS
STILL OWNED JOINTLY
BY WAR WOMAN'S
CORPORATION AND
DARKWING'S
ESTATE.

THIS
FACILITY
IS STILL
SUFFICIENT
FOR OUR
NEEDS.

ROBOT, I REALLY NEED
YOUR HELP. INVINCIBLE
HAS BEEN MISSING SINCE
THAT FIGHT WITH OMNI-MAN
WAS TELEVISED AND I
DON'T KNOW WHERE
HE COULD
BE.

HE
COULD BE
DEAD! OR LYING
SOMEWHERE
NEAR
DEAD.

DO YOU
THINK YOU COULD
CALL IN A FAVOR
FROM SOMEONE IN
THE GOVERNMENT
AND TRY AND FIND
HIM? YOU COULD
USE SPY
SATELLITES OR
SOMETHING.

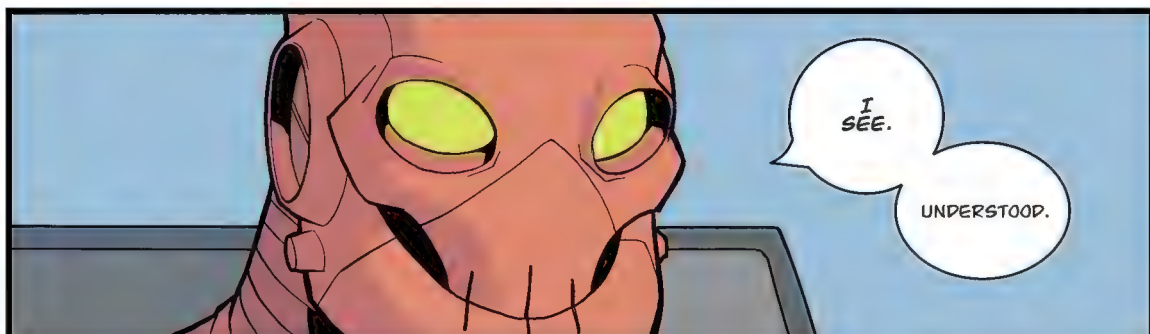
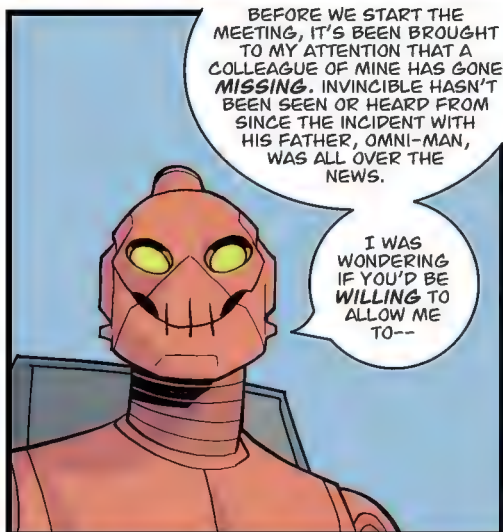
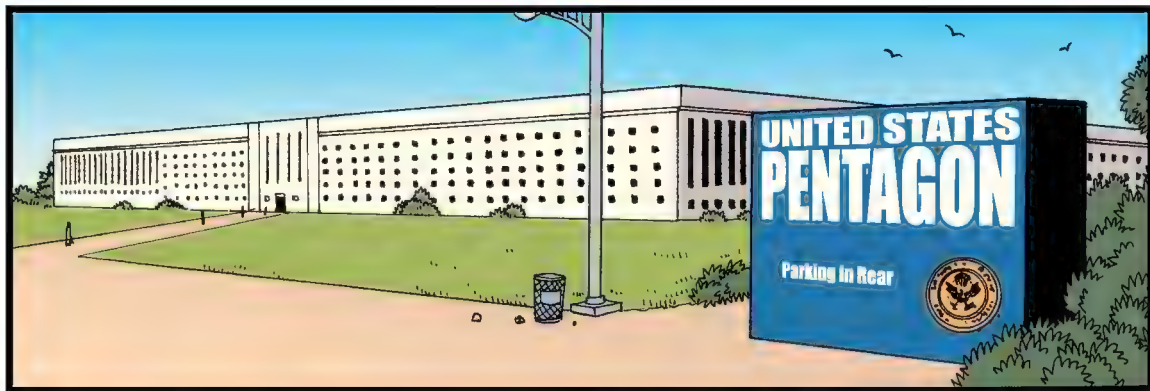
I WAS
NOT AWARE
OF INVINCIBLE'S
DISAPPEARANCE.
I WILL DO MY
BEST TO LOCATE
HIM. YOU HAVE
MY WORD.

THANKS, ROBOT.
PLEASE LET ME
KNOW AS SOON
AS YOU FIND
SOMETHING
OUT.

EVE,
I--

WHAT
GAVE YOU THE
IMPRESSION
THAT WE WERE
SPEAKING
AGAIN?

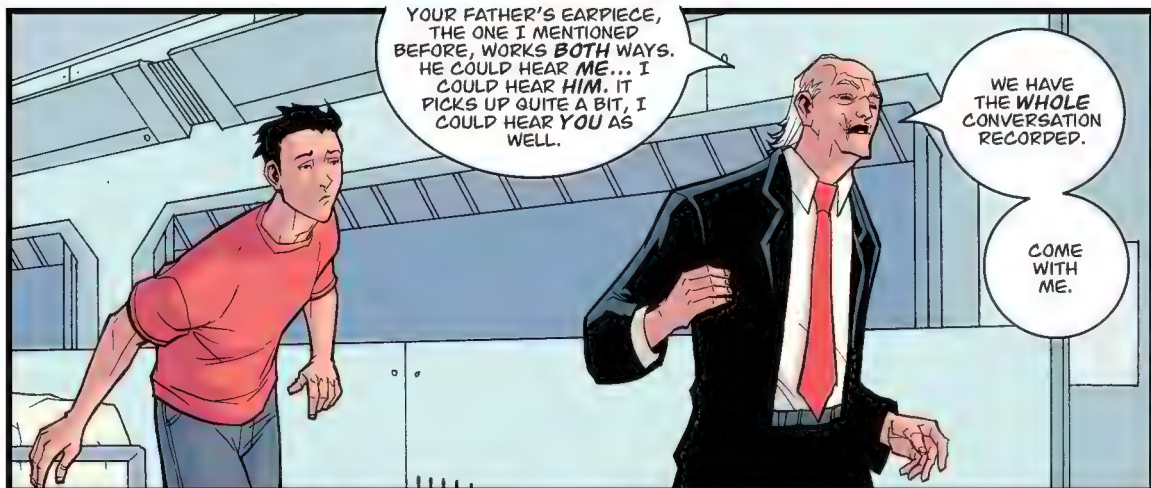






YEAH... TO SAY THE LEAST. IT'S PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU WERE THE SON OF OMNI-MAN. NOW THE PUBLIC SEES YOU AND OMNI-MAN IN A KNOCK-DOWN, DRAG-OUT BRAWL THAT RESULTED IN **THOUSANDS** OF LOST LIVES, AND OVER **TWICE** AS MANY INJURIES.

NOBODY KNOWS **WHY**, THOUGH. NOBODY KNOWS YOU WERE **PROTECTING** THIS PLANET FROM YOUR FATHER. NOBODY KNOWS THAT YOU WERE RISKING YOUR LIFE FOR THE GOOD OF US ALL.



AS I WAS SAYING, WE HAVE THE WHOLE CONVERSATION ON TAPE. WE LET YOUR MOTHER LISTEN TO IT... TO SAVE YOU THE TROUBLE OF HAVING TO EXPLAIN THIS WHOLE ORDEAL.



SHE WAS PRETTY UPSET BUT I THINK IT WILL BE GOOD FOR HER IN THE LONG RUN TO HAVE HEARD EVERYTHING YOUR FATHER SAID.



YOU DID WHAT?!

SHE HEARD EVERYTHING HE SAID? HOW COULD YOU DO THAT TO HER?!

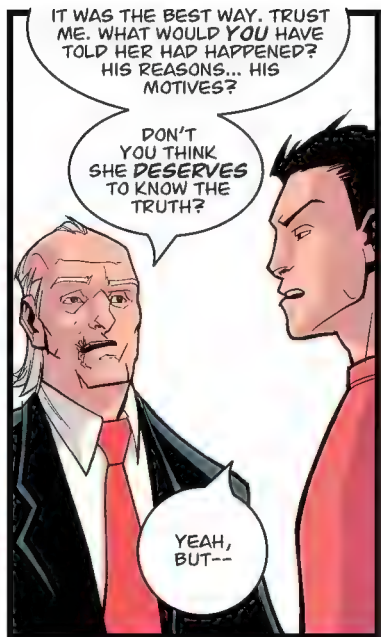
SOME OF THE THINGS HE SAID... I CAN'T BEAR THE THOUGHT OF HER EVER HEARING THEM. WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING?



IT WAS THE BEST WAY. TRUST ME. WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE TOLD HER HAD HAPPENED? HIS REASONS... HIS MOTIVES?

DON'T YOU THINK SHE DESERVES TO KNOW THE TRUTH?

YEAH, BUT--



I DID THE RIGHT THING. IF YOU HAD SUGAR COATED THE WHOLE SITUATION MAYBE SHE WOULD BE SITTING AT HOME WAITING FOR HIM TO COME BACK INSTEAD OF DEALING WITH THE SERIOUSNESS OF IT ALL.

I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT.

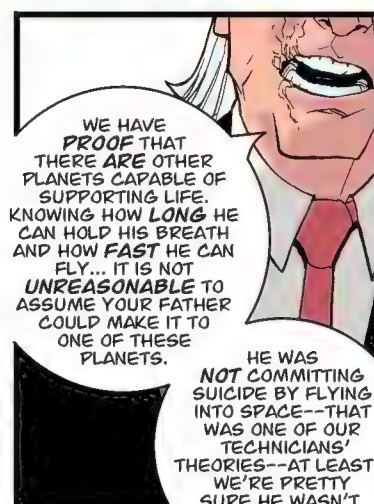
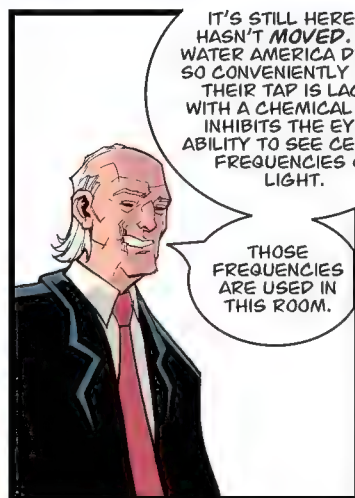
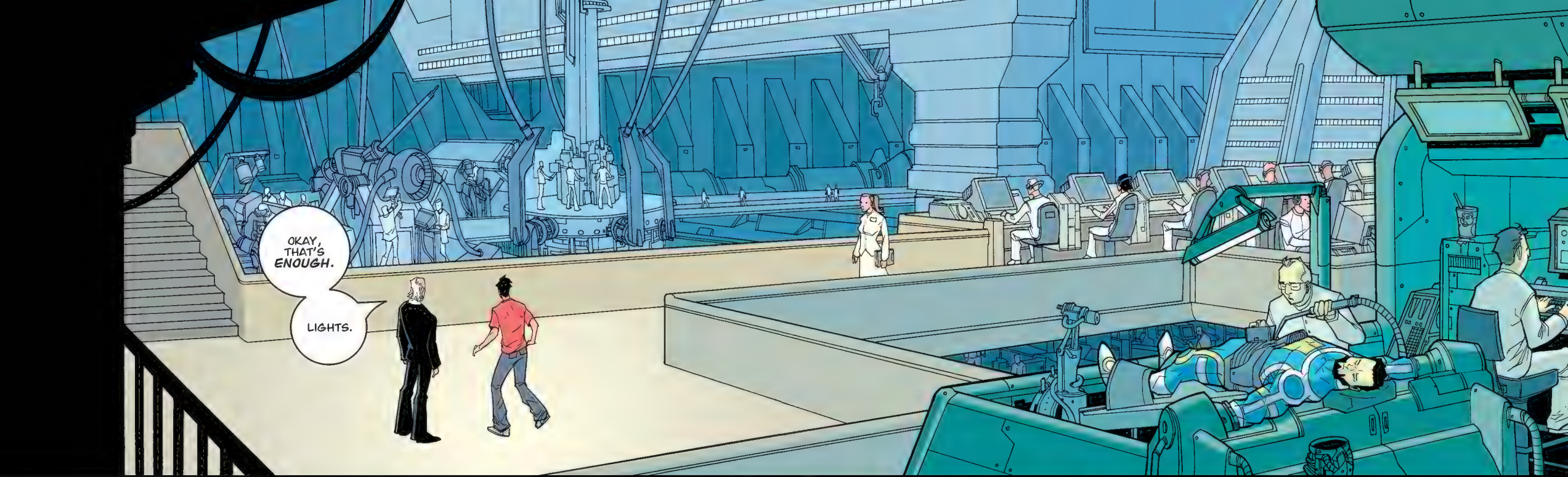


WAIT A MINUTE... WHERE ARE WE?

OH, SORRY.

LIGHTS.







YOU
MEAN
ME?

PRETTY
MUCH, YEAH.
WE'VE BEEN KEEPING
AN EYE ON YOU SINCE
YOUR FATHER TOLD US
YOU WERE DEVELOPING
POWERS OF YOUR OWN.
YOU'VE IMPROVED
VASTLY IN A VERY
SHORT AMOUNT OF
TIME.

YOUR
FATHER HIMSELF
SAID THAT YOU WILL
EVENTUALLY BE JUST
AS POWERFUL AS HIM.
WE NEED YOU... AND
AS YOU ALREADY
KNOW... WE HAVE A
LOT TO OFFER YOU
IN RETURN.

WHAT
DO YOU
SAY?

ALL I HAVE TO DO IS JUST BE
A SUPERHERO AND ALLOW YOU
TO TELL ME WHERE I NEED
TO BE WHEN BAD STUFF
HAPPENS?

THAT'S THE
GIST OF IT,
KID.

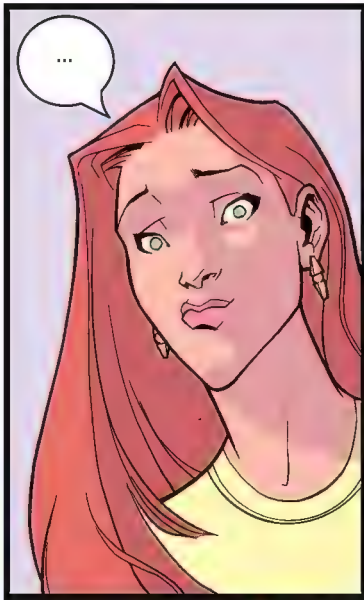
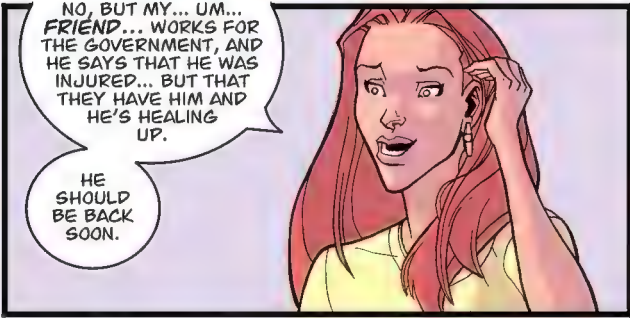
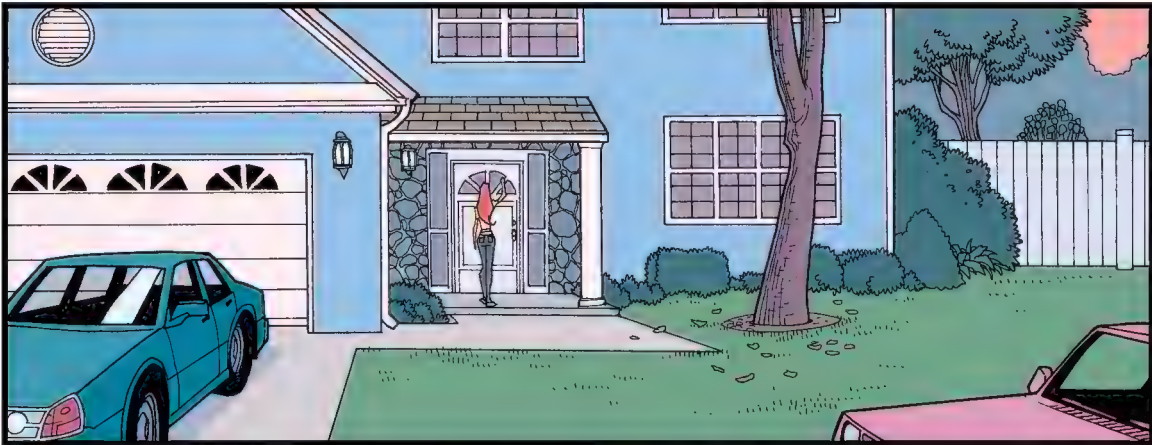
AND IN
RETURN YOU'LL
TAKE CARE OF MY
MOM AND I GET A
SCHOLARSHIP?

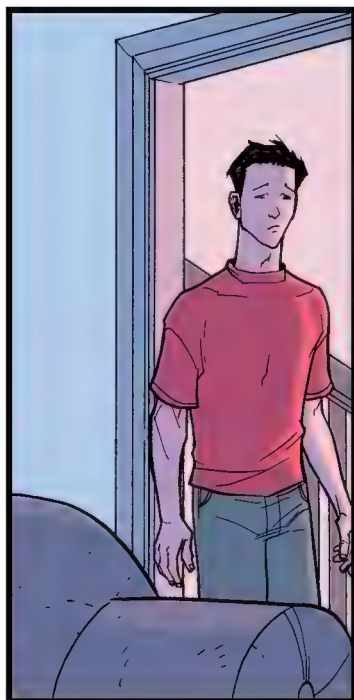
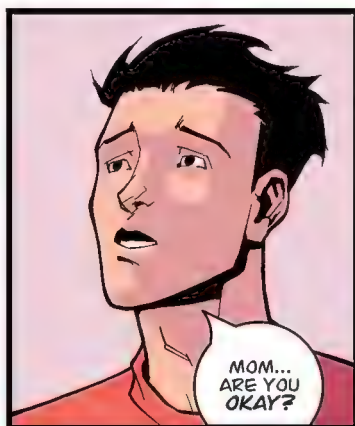
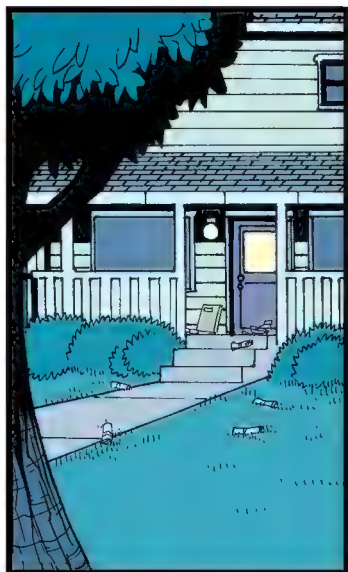
COUNT
ME IN.

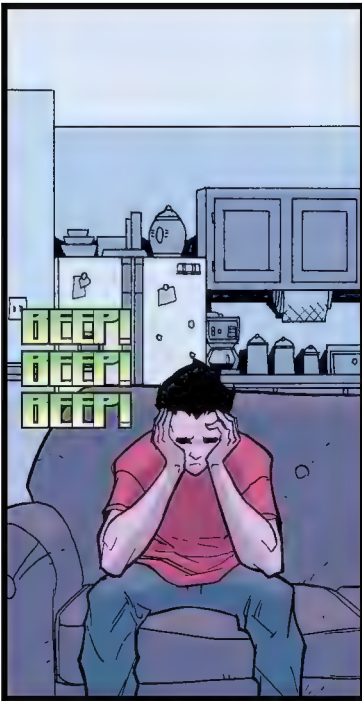


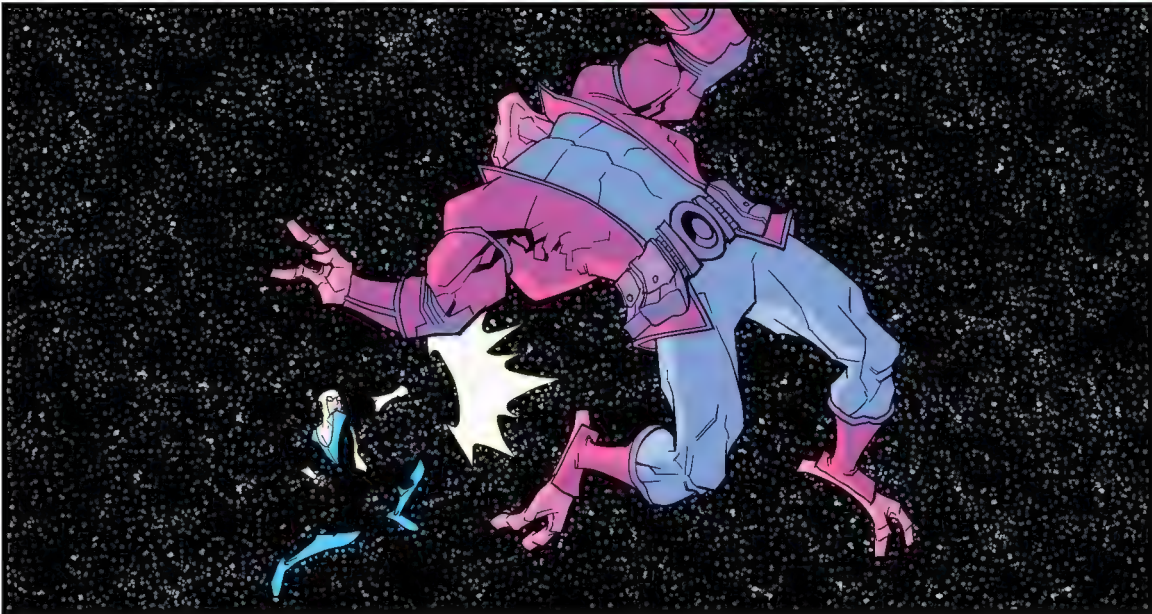
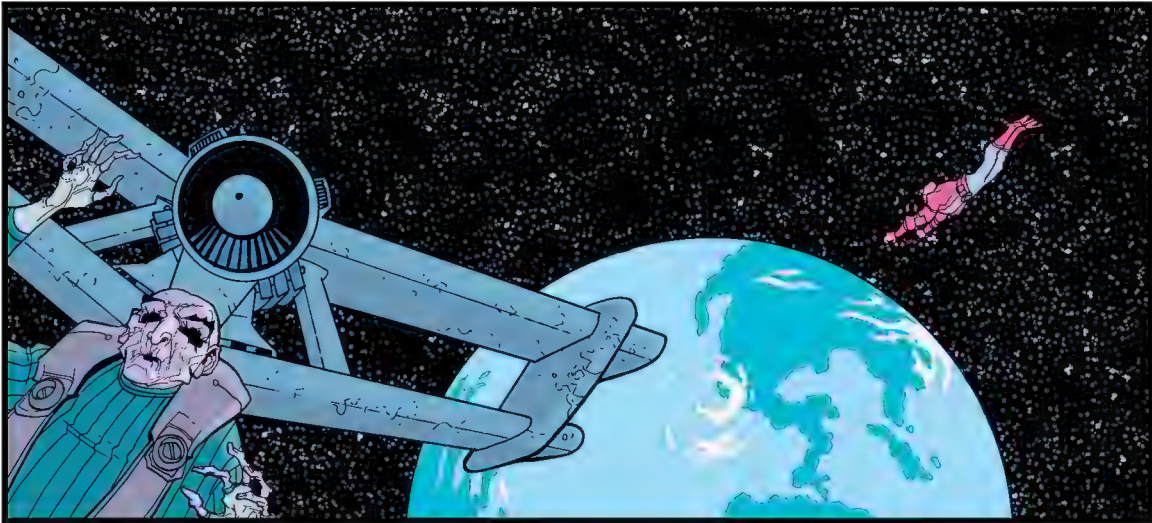
ALL RIGHT THEN.
FOLLOW ME. NOW ALL
WE NEED TO DO IS FIT
YOU WITH AN EAR PIECE
AND GET YOU A BEEPER
AND YOU'LL BE READY
TO GO HOME WITH
YOUR MOTHER.

WELCOME
ABOARD,
MARK.

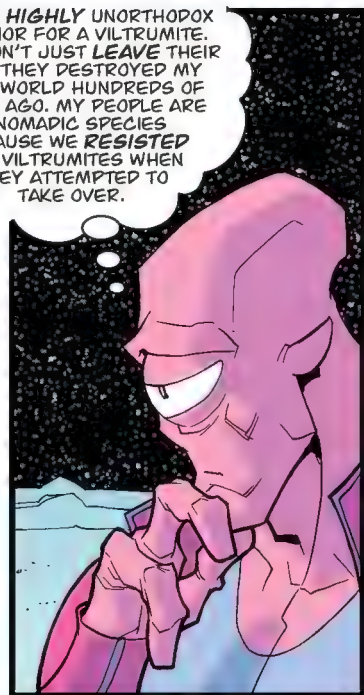
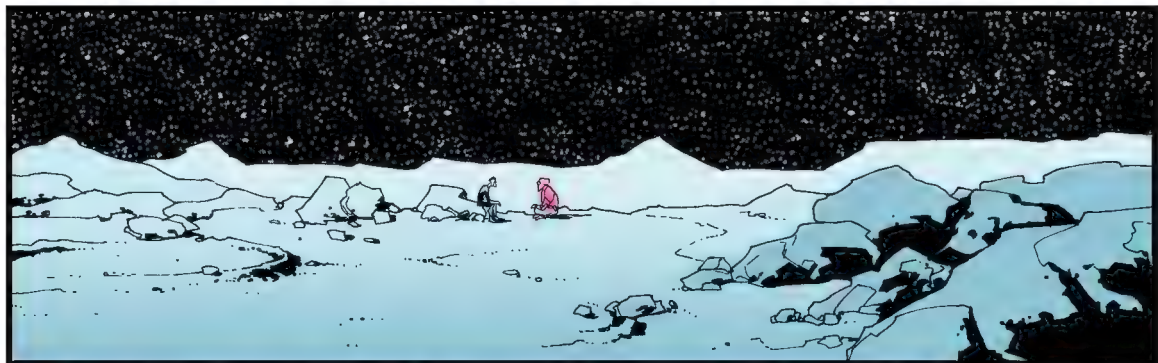






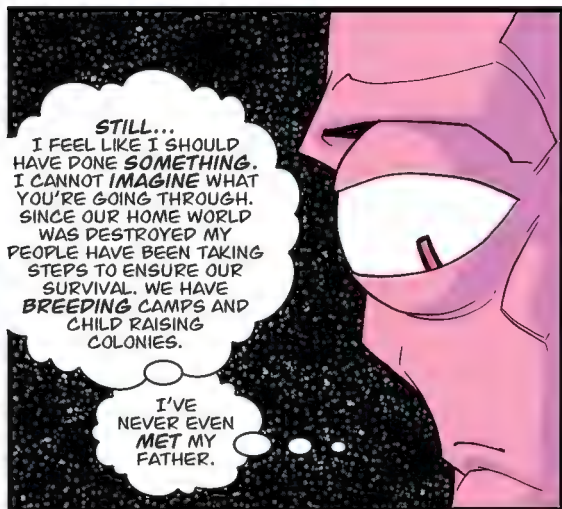








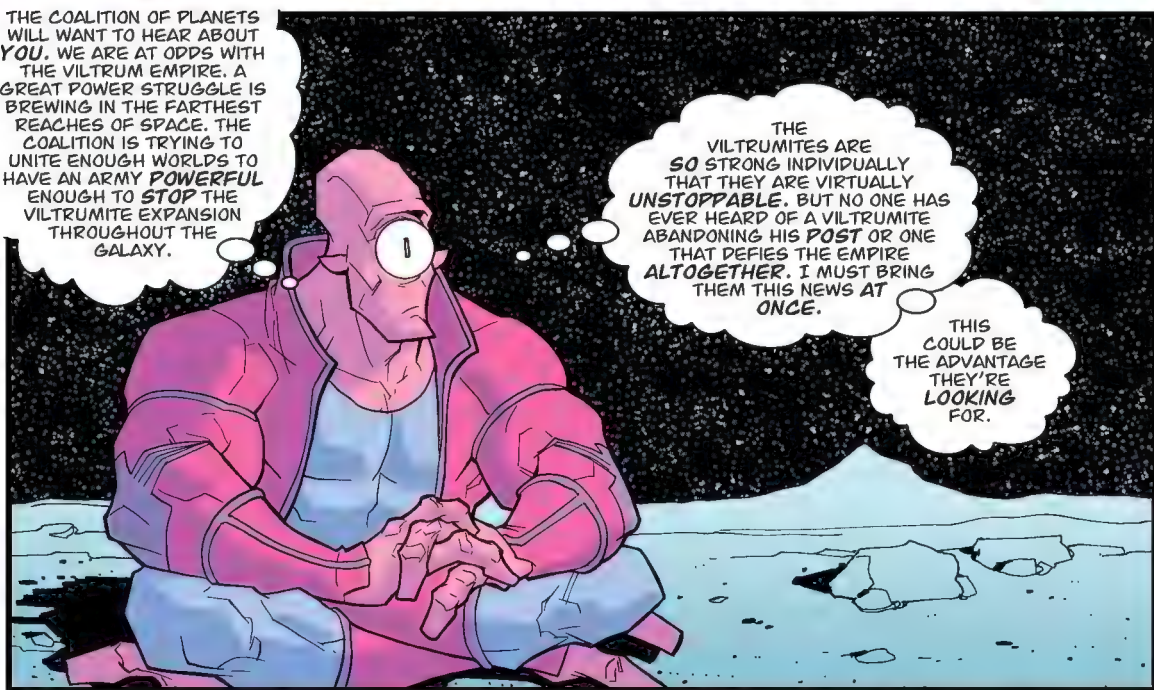
I WOULD HAVE JUST GONE TO MY DAD AND ASKED HIM ABOUT IT. WHO KNOWS HOW THINGS WOULD HAVE PLAYED OUT HAD THAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED?



STILL... I FEEL LIKE I SHOULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING. I CANNOT IMAGINE WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH. SINCE OUR HOME WORLD WAS DESTROYED MY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TAKING STEPS TO ENSURE OUR SURVIVAL. WE HAVE BREEDING CAMPS AND CHILD RAISING COLONIES.

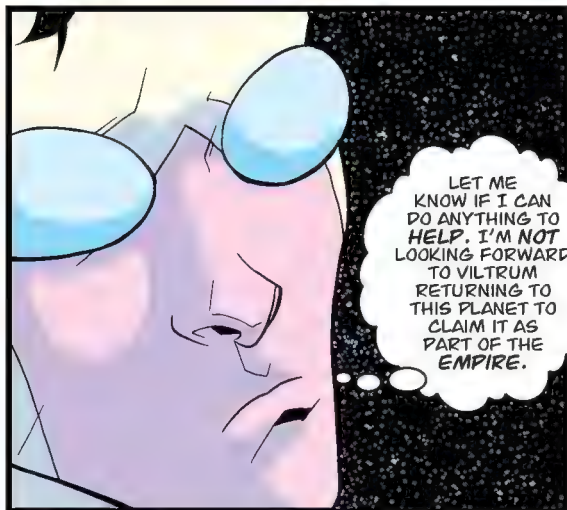
I'VE NEVER EVEN MET MY FATHER.

THE COALITION OF PLANETS WILL WANT TO HEAR ABOUT YOU. WE ARE AT ODDS WITH THE VILTRUM EMPIRE. A GREAT POWER STRUGGLE IS BREWING IN THE FARTHEST REACHES OF SPACE. THE COALITION IS TRYING TO UNITE ENOUGH WORLDS TO HAVE AN ARMY POWERFUL ENOUGH TO STOP THE VILTRUMITE EXPANSION THROUGHOUT THE GALAXY.



THE VILTRUMITES ARE SO STRONG INDIVIDUALLY THAT THEY ARE VIRTUALLY UNSTOPPABLE. BUT NO ONE HAS EVER HEARD OF A VILTRUMITE ABANDONING HIS POST OR ONE THAT DEFILES THE EMPIRE ALTOGETHER. I MUST BRING THEM THIS NEWS AT ONCE.

THIS COULD BE THE ADVANTAGE THEY'RE LOOKING FOR.

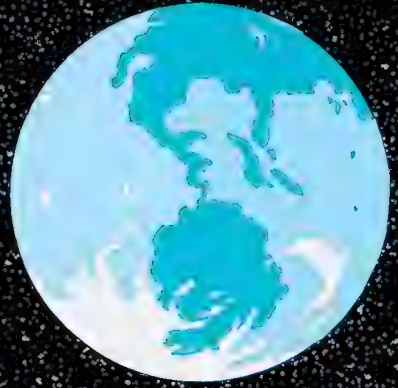


LET ME KNOW IF I CAN DO ANYTHING TO HELP. I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO VILTRUM RETURNING TO THIS PLANET TO CLAIM IT AS PART OF THE EMPIRE.

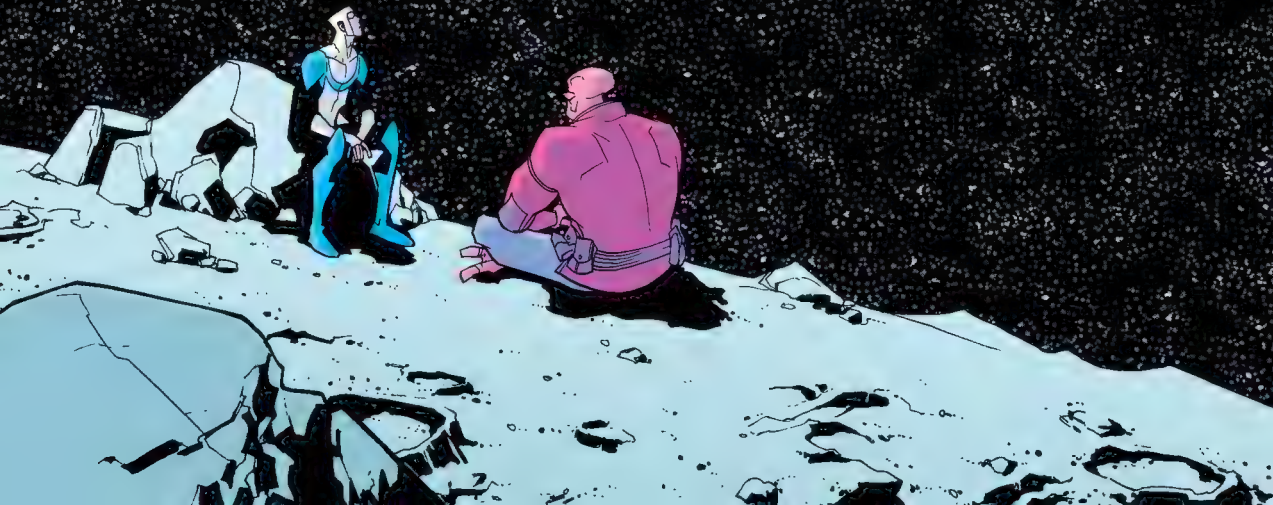


WILL DO. I'LL CERTAINLY LET YOU KNOW AS SOON AS I HEAR SOMETHING FROM THE COALITION.

IN THE MEANTIME... WHAT ABOUT YOU? WITH YOUR FATHER GONE AND ALL THAT'S HAPPENED... WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?



FINISH
HIGH
SCHOOL, I
GUESS.







As with all our trades we've had two versions of the cover. To your right there you should see the original version of the cover to this book. Above we have some of Cory's sketches for the cover. We did new covers for the second printings of the first two volumes. They are both pretty cool and both featured some kind of panel layout behind a central figure featuring side characters in the book. I don't like having multiple covers on the same book but I LIKED the panel design enough to make it the standard for our TPB covers. So instead of adding panels to a new cover when we do the eventual second printing of this book, I asked Cory to add some panels behind this cover. Instead... he decided to redraw the whole thing. You should have seen the look on Bill's face when he found out he got to color this cover all over again.





[illegible]

Here we have some sketches for the new version of the cover to this collection. Have I mentioned how much I love Donald? Man, that dude is so cool. Cecil Stedman is a character I've always planned on bringing into the book after Nolan did his thing in this arc. For kick, I thought it would be fun to introduce him in Brit instead of this book. That way he would seem established when he showed up here. Donald however was brought over from Brit because I love him as much as a heterosexual writer can love a fictional man. Don't believe me? Read the third Brit one-shot. I had to stop doing those because the forth one was going to be called "Brit: Really Donald's Book."





Here we see some of Cory's sketches for the covers of the issues collected in this volume.



Ah, now that we've got Cory out of the way I can go into detail about how much I love Ryan Ottley (almost as much as Donald). Ryan really pulled this book's fat out of the fire. Once Cory realized the monthly grind was not his thing, Ryan was brought in to take over this book. He really hit the ground running, pumping out the issues contained in this trade at what seemed like an alarming rate but what in reality turned out to be... a monthly schedule. With this book back on track, sales started climbing and rather than worrying if I was going to have to end the series at issue 13, I got to start thinking about how I was going to get to what I had planned for issue 15. Ryan Ottley saved this book. Aside from being a timely fellow, Ryan is also mighty talented, more so actually. On top of that the man is improving at an alarming rate. Comparing issue 9 to issue 13 in this book is like comparing night to day. Ryan has really taken this book and made it his own and I couldn't be happier to have him.



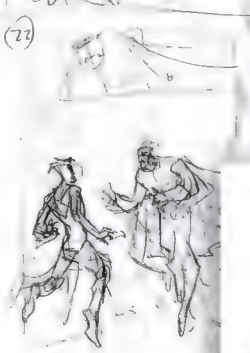
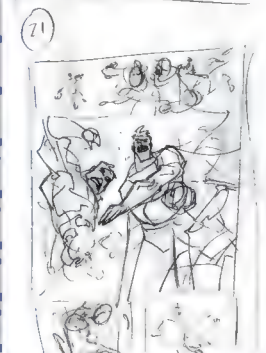
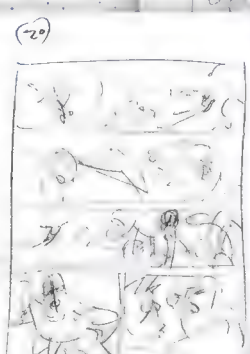
Oh... the art. Um... Ryan gets asked to do commission drawing all the time. I run them as pin-ups in the book. So this page and the next has all his commission drawings on it. Woo!



SKETCHBOOK

Some random sketches and page layouts for issues 10 and 11. I love that Shark Dude. I'm going to have to work a shark lawyer into the book at some point.

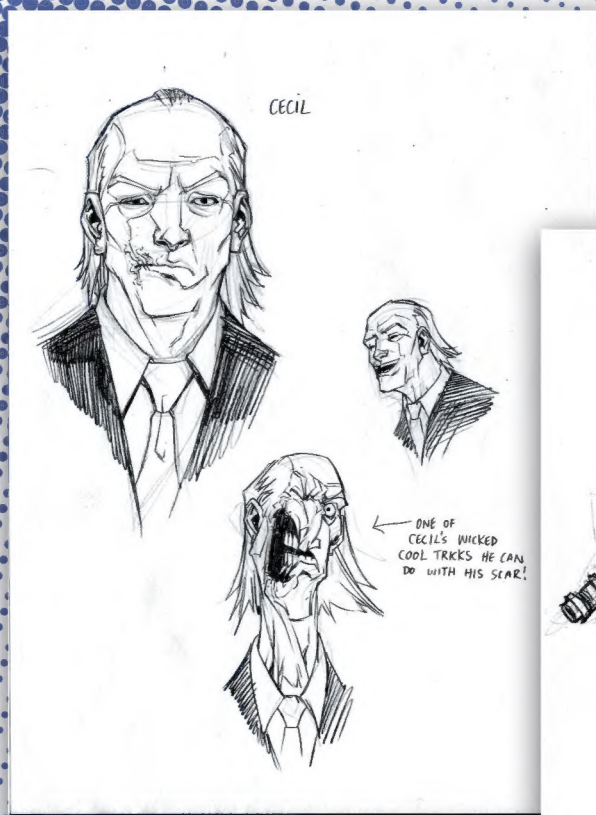
(4+5)



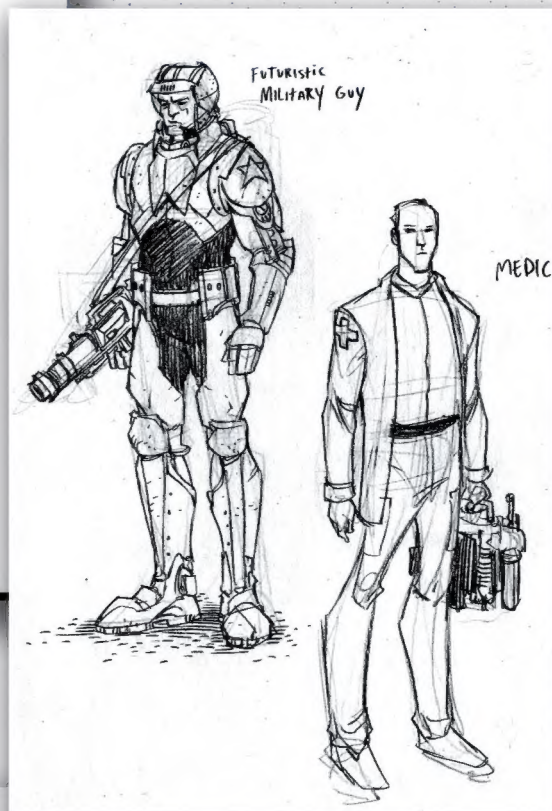


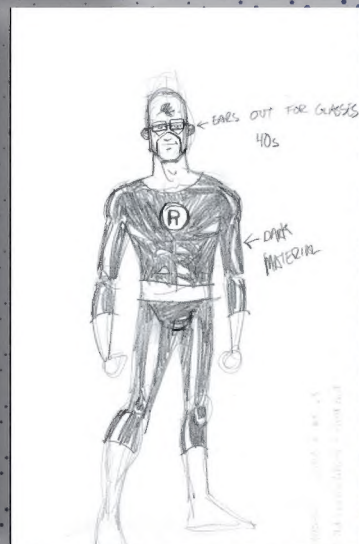
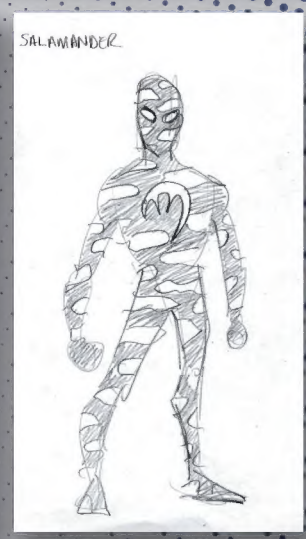
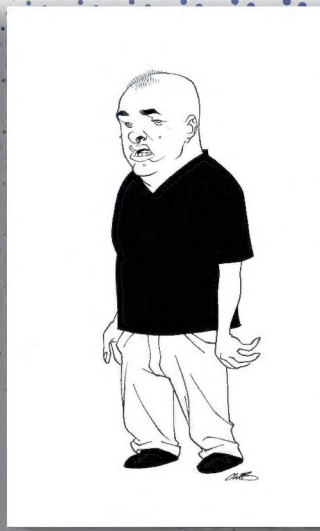
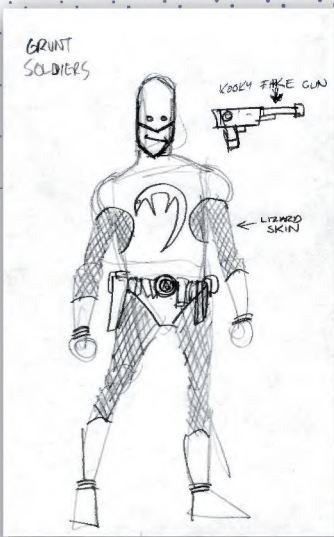
More page layouts and sketches and some alien designs by Ryan. 11 was a tough one for ol' Ryan. He had to come up with loads of alien designs and cities and stuff just on the fly. There was a ton of stuff to reference too, aside from just making some of the panels match the pages from issue 2 that Cory did. Ryan's always been a real trooper when I ask him to swipe stuff. He's very much against it but I think it's important to the story to show artistically how the events paralleled to the original origin Nolan told in issue 2... so I make him do it. What a trooper.





I'll let the sketches do the talking here.





This page is loaded with my crappy design sketches for the Lizard League and Doc Seismic. As well as the worst costume design ever for Shrinking Ray. I had Ryan redesign Ray for the next time he appeared... he looks MUCH better now. Also, just so you're not too bombarded with ugly drawings, I'm including Cory's design for Filip Schaff.

-Robert Kirkman



The Guardians of the Globe are dead. The super-hero community is a buzz with the who, what, when, where, why and how. Unbeknownst to him, Mark Grayson, aka Invincible, is at the center of the most dramatic event to hit the superhero community in decades. Having just gotten used to his new powers Invincible has settled into his new role as one of Earth's valued defenders. Little does he know that his life is about to take a drastic turn for the worse.

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INVINCIBLE, VOL. 3:
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